What Dreams Are Made Of

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What Dreams Are Made Of

by seocago

Summary

Shen Yuan was back. To his own body, to his own room. To his own world. Was he not dead after all? Was the transmigration thing all a dream? Then why.. would he hold this crying mess of a disciple in his arms, chanting a very worrying amount of sorry and don't leave?

Nonsense. Complete nonsense.

Yet Shen Yuan closed his eyes, hand skillfully reaching to tug off Luo Binghe's hair ornament before tossing it aside on his bed. Letting his fingers comb through the disciple's disheveled hair as he said, "I'm here." No energy left to think. Mumbling, "This master is here, this master won't leave."

And just like that, Shen Yuan fell back asleep; Luo Binghe in his arms.

Chapter 1: Dobby is Free!

Shen Qingqiu woke up to the sound of a man crying.

There was a loud sob—heart-shattering, almost. Shen Qingqiu couldn't help but to tear away his gaze from the oddly familiar white ceiling, slowly turning his head to look at where the sound came from.

His eyes widened at the sight.

"Binghe?" He tried calling, voice hoarse.

Luo Binghe looked up from where he was crouched down on the floor, eyes brimmed with tears.

Shen Qingqiu brought his hand up to his temple. Closing his eyes as he muttered, "What happened?"

The last thing he remembered was the way his body fell from the roof. Right after…

Shen Qingqiu froze.

Right after he self-destructed! To save Luo Binghe! And if things were going as he planned, he should've died! Shen Qingqiu should've died. Getting reborn into a new body was part of the plan, but seeing his disciple's face the moment he opened his eyes was certainly not!

This was out of the plan!

"...Shizun?"

Speaking of the devil.

Shen Qingqiu took a deep breath, slowly prying his hand away from his face as he opened his eyes. Voice calm as he spoke, "Yes?" Now that his mind was clearer, his voice somehow sounded different to his ears. Shen Qingqiu frowned. Clearing his throat before he spoke once again, "Yes."

Luo Binghe looked at him with such an intense gaze he had to try his best not to roll over from the soft mattress.

Soft?

Shen Qingqiu immediately looked down. Soft! The mattress he was sleeping on was extremely soft! Just like the one he used to have back when…

Letting out a shuddering breath, Shen Qingqiu braced himself as he took a glance at his surroundings. No. No, this couldn't be real.

The bed was, indeed, *his* bed. But not Shen Qingqiu's. This room was definitely not the bamboo house.

It was Shen Yuan's bed; Shen Yuan's room. The one he used to have back when he was still alive. Back before all these crazy scum villain shits happened.

His eyes once again landed on Luo Binghe. Still crouched down on the floor, near the pristine white bedside table his little sister—Shen Yuan's sister had gotten him as a present a few years back. A quite distant memory, now that he thought of it.

Shen Qingqiu blinked. Once. Twice.

The supposedly-not-there stallion novel protagonist was still staring at him. Wide-eyed.

...Then Shen Qingqiu slapped his own face. Quite hard actually, his head throbbed. Hissing in pain as he felt fingers closing around his wrist, pulling his hand back.

In his moment of daze, Luo Binghe had rushed to his side.

More reasons for Shen Qingqiu to smack his own head!

"Shizun!" Luo Binghe squeaked, tightening his grip to stop him. "Shizun, no!"

Luo Binghe was too shocked to cry before, but his tears had started to fall once more. "This disciple was wrong.. This.. I.. Shizun!" He sobbed into Shen Qingqiu's chest, wetting his old favorite Harry Potter pajamas in which engraved *Dobby is free.*

Free my ass! Shen Qingqiu cursed in his head.

Too real. The hand around Shen Qingqiu's wrist felt too real. Too loud. The choked out sobs and the chants of sorry that followed after were too loud.

"Shizun, I'm.. We're dead." Luo Binghe trembled. "I can't feel.. I can't feel.. Anything. No energy. No.. no.. Shizun." He sobbed some more, now half-lying down on top of his Shizun. "I'm sorry.. This disciple had.. I.. Sorry.."

Luo Binghe cried so hard his whole body shook.

Actually feeling worried, Shen Qingqiu sighed. He wrapped his arms around Luo Binghe, pulling him even closer. There was no resistance at all, Luo Binghe let himself be held. Held by his Shizun. Warm, familiar. Different face, yet very much alive compared to the cold, motionless body he held before he woke up in this strange place; power all stripped.

"Stop crying, you silly." Shen Qingqiu sighed once more.

Now he knew why his voice sounded strange.

It was Shen Yuan's voice!

He hadn't heard his voice for so long, he almost forgot how it sounded like.

He was back, then. To his own body. To his own room. Was he not dead after all? Was the transmigration thing all a dream? Then why.. would he hold this crying mess of a disciple in his arms!

Luo Binghe kept chanting sorry and a very worrying amount of don't leave.

Shen Qing—Yuan, closed his eyes once more. His hand skillfully tugged off Luo Binghe's hair ornament, putting it aside on the wide bed before combing his fingers through the disciple's disheveled hair. "I'm here," Shen Yuan said. Too tired to think. "This master is here, this master won't leave."

And just like that, he fell back asleep. Luo Binghe in his arms.

Chapter 2: protag halo bye bye

Chapter Notes

CW // mentioned suicide.

A little note : with the novel's protagonist gone, there was no cliffhanger! No plot twists, nothing. The Resentment of Chunshan? Lived up to its title! A tragic ending, a tragic ending. Now let's join hands to see this little sheep pursue his own happiness. In a whole different world where he no longer takes the burden of the main role. Away from danger; content. Happy. Safe.

((fluffy bingbing agenda, yes.))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next time Shen Yuan woke up, his vision was once again greeted by his disciple's face.

Luo Binghe was looking at him. Shen Yuan looked back, face only inches away from each other.

It seemed like Shen Yuan hadn't slept for long. Luo Binghe's eyes were still teary, nose red from crying. Shen Yuan couldn't even stop himself from smiling—finger reaching up to boop on the younger's nose. "Feeling better?" he asked, chuckling at the way Luo Binghe's face scrunched slightly at the boop.

Luo Binghe didn't move away though. Voice merely a whisper as he called, "Shizun?"

"Mm?" Shen Yuan hummed, feeling lighter now that he accepted that he had, somehow, magically returned. Dragging this lost sheep along with him.

"Shizun?" Luo Binghe called again, a tad bit louder.

Shen Yuan only looked at him this time. Waiting.

"Shizun."

"I am here." Shen Yuan sighed, brushing strands of hair away from the disciple's face. "Will you stop calling?"

Luo Binghe looked awestruck. Still, he called once more, "Shizun."

"Here," Shen Yuan answered, hand now moving to pat Luo Binghe's head in the exact way that he used to do.

The younger one's breath hitched. Voice trembling as he spoke, "Shizun…" He nuzzled his head against Shen Yuan's palm. "Shizun is here.."

"I'm here." Shen Yuan patted his head some more before sliding his hand down Luo Binghe's shoulder, resting it gently on his arm. He then asked, "Will you move?"

As if finally realizing where he was lying down, Luo Binghe moved away. Still lying close, but no longer on top of his Shizun. Eyes never leaving Shen Yuan as he asked, "Do I look different too?"

Shen Yuan raised an eyebrow at the question. Stifling back a laugh as he shook his head. "You look exactly the same."

It was true. Luo Binghe was exactly just how he remembered him; though he had to admit it was more of the.. Old Luo Binghe. Those eyes, at least. They looked exactly the same as the Luo Binghe who doted on his Shizun all the time.

"Shizun looks pretty," Luo Binghe suddenly blurted out.

Oh?

Shen Yuan tilted his head. "Is that supposed to be a compliment?"

Thinking that he had hurt his Shizun's pride for using the word pretty, Luo Binghe shook his head. Ears slightly heating up at the realization. "Shizun looks.. Good," he tried. His expression turned serious as he continued, "I have.. Heard. Of everything, I have heard."

Shen Yuan gave him a little gesture to keep talking.

"About Shizun.. always protecting me." Luo Binghe took a deep, shaky breath before continuing, "I was wrong. I was.. I. I couldn't control my anger.. and the sword was suddenly acting up. And. When I opened my eyes, you were.. You were.."

Sensing that Luo Binghe would cry again if he didn't stop him, Shen Yuan gently squeezed on his arm. Saying, "I am here now."

"The.. Jinlan City, it wasn't me. I didn't.. want to harm anyone. Didn't want to harm you. I didn't kill anyone from Huan Hua too. Gongyi Xiao.. it.. wasn't me," Luo Binghe stuttered. His gaze was pleading as he searched for Shen Yuan's eyes. "I don't.. I don't want to harm you. Ever. No."

Shen Yuan squeezed on his arm once more, silently telling him that he understood. They were, after all, things that had happened in the past. Shen Qingqiu in that stallion novel was supposedly dead; both the original and now the transmigrated one too. He didn't know how he ended up back here in his world, but Shen Yuan was glad he had gotten another chance in life. He wouldn't waste it to mourn over past injustice.

"I.. didn't want to kill you. I don't," Luo Binghe whispered. "I don't want to.. I don't want to.. Shizun. I don't.."

“Very well.” Shen Yuan nodded, cutting off Luo Binghe’s incoherent words. “There’s no need to keep repeating. This old man understands.” He then asked, “How did you get here?”

“I don’t.. know.” Luo Binghe shook his head. “I stabbed myself, wishing to be by Shizun’s side in the afterlife at least. Then I woke up here.”

This brat!! Wasting his protagonist halo to be with his Shizun! What kind of gamble was that even!! Shen Yuan had to hold himself back from actually blowing up. Thankfully, Luo Binghe’s expression was pitiful enough to guard his fake calm.

“I understand,” Shen Yuan said. He didn’t!!! None of this made sense. None. Though that didn’t stop him from saying, “We’re both here now.”

Luo Binghe was out of words by then, only keeping his eyes on Shen Yuan as if afraid he’d lose him even if he blinked.

When Shen Yuan sat up, he sat up too. Whole body alert.

“I need to check up on something,” said Shen Yuan, already moving toward the edge of the bed to stand up. “You stay here and be a good boy, alright?”

Shen Yuan almost shrieked in delight at the sight of his slippers. They were still there! By the side of his bed! Waiting for him at their usual place!! He slipped his feet in right away.

He was ready to walk to the door when Luo Binghe caught his sleeve. He turned to look at him, head slightly tilted. “Yes?”

Luo Binghe only held on to his sleeve, saying nothing.

“Is there anything you need?” Shen Yuan asked again, searching for his disciple’s eyes. “Do tell. I’ll get it on the way back.”

When he noticed the slight tremble of Luo Binghe’s lips, Shen Yuan knew right away that what the younger one needed was *him*.

He sighed softly, prying his sleeve off Luo Binghe’s grip to offer him his hand instead. Luo Binghe gratefully took it.

“We’ll need to do something with your outfit first,” Shen Yuan said, lightly pulling him up from the bed. “Come.”

Luo Binghe only did as he was told, clutching on his Shizun’s hand as they walked. He only let go when Shen Yuan told him to strip, tossing him some.. strange clothes Luo Binghe had never seen in his life. But since Shizun told him to wear them, he did. With Shizun’s help, of course. Shizun had told him the strange combination name was a t-shirt and a pair of basketball shorts. Luo Binghe only nodded at the information. Heart swelling with pride.

His Shizun was, after all, the most knowledgeable!

They walked out of the room, hand in hand as Shen Yuan guided him down the stairs. Luo Binghe took a look around, amazed at the sight that greeted his eyes. It was a big house. Very big. Was this even a house? Luo Binghe wasn't sure. Compared to the bamboo house, this was.. definitely a palace. A grand one.

"Shiz.."

Shen Yuan hushed him up before he could even talk. "Gege," he whispered, lightly tugging on the younger one's hand. "Don't call me Shizun here. Call me gege instead."

Luo Binghe immediately straightened up. His face felt warm hearing the word. It sounded almost.. too intimate. Yet he tried, "Gege." And that was it. He decided it needed time for him to get used to that—for his heart to get used to that. He liked the way it sounded though. Liked the way Shen Yuan nodded in approval.

"Yuan gege," Shen Yuan said.

"Yuan gege," Luo Binghe carefully repeated after him.

"Good." Shen Yuan, once again, nodded in approval.

Luo Binghe felt like his heart was about to burst out of his ribcage. Wasn't he supposed to be dead!! What was he supposed to do with all these wild thump thump thump!! Nonsense!!

Chapter End Notes

This was actually my very fist fic in this fandom, thank you so much for reading! I just.. had to.. unleash.. all the love,,, for bingbingie... bing.. bing... bing... ((proceeds to soft bingbing brainrot))

Chapter 3: sleeping beauty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luo Binghe hid behind his Shizun when they came across yet another person.

It was probably the fourth—or fifth? Person they encountered ever since they left the room. This one, too, bowed his head in respect as they walked closer. Greeting, "Young Master Shen."

"Can you see him?" Shen Yuan asked the man, giving a light gesture with his chin toward Luo Binghe.

The man took it as a cue to specifically bow at Luo Binghe.

Luo Binghe could only blink. Confusion written all over his face as he tried to hide more behind his Shizun; hand clutching tighter. "He sees me too," Luo Binghe whispered, almost in awe.

He didn't know why his Shizun had been asking people around whether they could see him, but he didn't really oppose the idea. Everyone seemed to know his Shizun! It felt safe to be by his side. To get shown around.

Shen Yuan seemed to be deep in thought for a while before he nodded. Saying, "Very well." His hand pulled Luo Binghe back to his side, like what he did each time the disciple tried to hide behind him. Which, he thought, was quite pointless considering how the younger one was slightly taller. Bulkier, too! "Where's Granny?"

He walked again once he had gotten his answer, pulling Luo Binghe along with him toward the kitchen. "Granny?" Luo Binghe asked.

"She's been working here for as long as I can remember," Shen Yuan answered, smiling fondly at the thought. It had been a while. A long while, actually. It felt good to be home. "Almost like a real grandma to me. She's also the only one who can scold me for not eating."

A soft chuckle escaped Shen Yuan's lips and Luo Binghe, once again, was struck in awe. He didn't know how long his Shizun had been here to have all these.. fond memories, but he respected that very much. He cherished the way his Shizun smile, he'd do anything to keep that.

And when they finally entered the supposed-to-be kitchen, Luo Binghe could finally see her.

The old woman was in the middle of chopping carrots when she looked up at the approaching visitors. The knife was immediately put aside, grinning wide at Shen Yuan. Exclaiming, "The sleeping beauty is finally awake!"

Unlike the others, she didn't bow her head. So when she turned her gaze to Luo Binghe, looking amused yet confused at the same time, Luo Binghe took the initiative to bow politely. Hands up, head down. Like the way he had been taught to bow back at Qing Jing Peak. He wanted to look good! For his Shizun!

The bow had earned him a laughter from the old woman. He only looked up once his Shizun reached for his hands, lightly pushing them down before taking one hand back in his. Luo Binghe felt warm all over.

"Would this be the prince that broke the curse?" Granny asked, smile never leaving her face as she turned her gaze back to Shen Yuan.

Shen Yuan only snorted. Asking, "How long did I sleep this time?"

"Fifteen hours!" Granny threw her hands exasperatedly, and Shen Yuan couldn't help but laugh at this. Oh, he missed this! All the time he spent as Shen Qingqiu.. only took fifteen hours then? Fifteen hours of sleep! Granny then continued, "Even A-Yi was concerned, she tried waking you up but you only frowned in your sleep when she jumped around on your bed!"

"She jumped on my bed?" Shen Yuan asked, scrunching up his nose. "With those dirty feet of hers?"

Granny only laughed, but that was enough of an answer. His little sister always woke him up that way whenever he slept for too long, they all know how much he would curse at her for that. That little brat! Taking advantage of her unconscious brother! He missed her though.

The hand in his grip seemed to shake a little so Shen Yuan leaned closer to the disciple. "She means no harm," he assured. "A-Yi is my sister."

Luo Binghe immediately relaxed.

Seeing this exchange in front of her, understanding flashed through Granny's face. She smiled, gesturing at the dining room before taking the knife back in her hand. "Go take a seat, I'll cook you two something."

Shen Yuan gleefully obeyed. He nodded, pulling Luo Binghe along with him. He even pulled the chair for him! Urging him to sit first before taking a seat himself, right next to the blushing disciple. "Granny's a great cook," he said. Luo Binghe only nodded.

To say that he was overwhelmed by Shizun's attention was an understatement. It had been.. so long. Too long. He would willingly jump to the Endless Abyss if that meant he could get this. Shizun holding him, Shizun smiling at him. Shizun.

He would endure anything. Any pain, any torture; if it would lead up to this. He unconsciously shifted closer. Whispering, "Shizun?"

"Mm?" Shen Yuan reached up to gently put the disciple's hair behind his shoulder. "We should brush your hair later."

Right. Luo Binghe had been too awestruck, he did nothing with his hair. Letting it fall loose. His blush deepened, nodding lightly before looking down. "This disciple must've been very unsightly," he muttered. "This disciple would brush his hair before going out next time, not to embarass Shizun."

Shen Yuan laughed. He then exclaimed, "You always look good!"

Luo Binghe jumped on his seat.

"You always look good," Shen Yuan repeated, voice soft as his hand moved to caress Luo Binghe's hair. Making the younger one look up at him. "You always look good, it's almost unfair."

The expression on Shen Yuan's face was soft, but Luo Binghe once again lowered his head. For different reasons this time. Oh, his heart.. his poor heart..

Since when did Shizun smile and laugh this much? It was almost like.. he held nothing back. And this was bad for Luo Binghe's heart. He hadn't felt this small in front of anyone before, but Luo Binghe figured he didn't mind if it was Shizun.

His train of thought was interrupted by a loud shriek.

"You're not dead!"

Luo Binghe looked up in time to see his Shizun stood up. Arms wide open as he spoke, "Sorry to disappoint you."

"You old hag!" the foreign voice scolded, now sounding really close to Luo Binghe's side. Followed by the sound of a chair being pulled. "Who's this pretty guest we have here?"

Shen Yuan sat back down. Luo Binghe turned his gaze to his side, eyes widening at the beauty seated next to him.

“Oh, pretty,” the girl said, propping her chin up on her palm. Leaning on the table as she watched him intently. "I believe we haven't met before?"

Her face looked so much like this version of Shizun, Luo Binghe immediately could put a name to match. This must've been A-Yi! The one who jumped on Shizun's bed! His gaze unconsciously dropped to her feet, wanting to see how dirty they could be.

His eyes widened. The nails.. So pretty! He hadn't seen nails as colorful as those. He then looked up once more, this time looking at the girl's hands. He couldn't hold back his gasp at the sight.

The nails! Even prettier! They even got tiny, sparkly drawings.

"Oh, you like this?" the girl asked, seeming amused at his reaction. She held up her other hand to give him a better view. "I can paint your nails too! Special price for gege's friends, tripled the original one!"

The tone almost sounded like she was offering him some kind of a huge discount.

Shen Yuan snorted. "You brat," he muttered as he shook his head. A fond smile on his face as he spoke, "Binghe, this is Ziyi. My sister. Shen Ziyi, this pretty boy right here is Binghe."

Shen Ziyi grinned. She grinned so wide Luo Binghe wanted to hide back behind his Shizun.

"Bing ge!" She exclaimed, making Shen Yuan choke on air. "Did my brother pay you to be here or something? It was quite a rare sight to see him bring someone home. A very gorgeous one at that."

Luo Binghe slowly turned his eyes back to Shen Yuan, who only shrugged at his questioning gaze.

"I have friends too, excuse you," said Shen Yuan.

"You only sleep and eat and drown yourself in that gravure collection of yours!" Shen Ziyi pointed an accusing finger at her brother. "Such a lazy homebody. Wasting that pretty face reading porns instead of experiencing them!"

This time it was Luo Binghe's turn to choke. Ears red.

The siblings were about to quarrel some more but luckily Granny came, a tray of foods in hands. Interrupting those two as she set the foods down on the table. There were only two plates though; one for Shen Yuan and one for Luo Binghe.

Luo Binghe immediately tried to put his plate in front of Shen Ziyi, but the girl right away refused. Saying, "I'm on a diet."

Luo Binghe blinked confusedly. He put back the plate on his side of the table though, blinking some more as he took in the sight of his food. Luo Binghe had never seen noodles coated in creamy white! And the noodles are so huge! But flat! Topped with sliced meat!

Shen Yuan was about to offer him a fork but he held himself back. Instead, he pulled Luo Binghe's plate closer to him. Figuring that the younger one might not know how to eat, he took the matter into his hands. Taking a spoon in another hand before swirling the pasta with his fork.

Luo Binghe could only watch with wide eyes as his Shizun tried to feed him.

"Open up," Shen Yuan said, holding the fork closer to Luo Binghe's lips. "Eat."

The disciple obeyed.

Granny and Shen Ziyi exchanged a look.

Chapter End Notes

sHIZUN LET THE BABY SHEEP GET HIS NAILS DONE

Chapter 4: pretty nails don't lie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shen Ziyi offered herself to do his nails.

Luo Binghe nodded, albeit failing to hold himself back from nodding too eagerly. He then turned his face back to his Shizun. Gaze almost pleading.

Shen Yuan looked taken aback. He asked though, “Do you want to get your nails done?”

Luo Binghe once again nodded. A bit hesitant this time, eyes glancing at the empty plate as he frowned. Maybe he was asking for too much? Granny had given him food! Shizun had fed him even, with his own hands! And he still wanted to get his nails done? Shameless!

The disciple mentally scolded himself. Shaking his head as he looked at Shen Ziyi, a small smile made its way to his lips. Gently refusing, “I don’t.. think it’s necessary.”

To which Shen Ziyi strongly disagreed.

“Look at those nails!” the girl shrieked, reaching for both of Luo Binghe’s hands and held them up. Throwing an accusing look at her brother as she continued, “Rough hands, dirty nails! Just what kind of job did you make him do, you old hag!”

Luo Binghe was about to defend his Shizun, though deep down he.. knew that it was, indeed, partially his Shizun’s fault. He had no time cutting his nails down there, obviously. No time caring for them either once he got back. He unconsciously shifted closer to Shen Ziyi.

“I *will* take care of you,” Shen Ziyi declared. Standing up from her seat as she pulled Luo Binghe along with her. “You can’t stop me!”

That one was for Shen Yuan—who, by now, had no objection to any of that. He held up both hands in surrender. Chuckling lightly as he nodded. “Go,” he answered Luo Binghe’s unspoken question. “I’ll join you in a bit.”

Luo Binghe wanted to cling to his Shizun. He didn’t want to leave! But Shen Ziyi was already dragging him out; another assuring nod from Shen Yuan was enough to soothe his heart. He slowly turned his face to look forward. Letting Shen Ziyi pull him along.

She.. took him to her room, apparently. Luo Binghe didn’t know how he knew, he just *knew*. There was something about this room that was very her. He let himself get manhandled toward a pink chair. He sat down, watching as the girl dragged another chair and sat in front of him. There was a table to his right, a huge mirror resting on the wall.

He caught a glimpse of his own reflection and blushed, immediately tearing his gaze away.

You always look good, Shizun had said before. With that.. soft, dreamy look. Hand stroking Luo Binghe's ha……..

"Bing ge?"

Luo Binghe cleared his throat, focusing his gaze on Shen Ziyi who had been watching him. Had she spoken anything before this? Luo Binghe wasn't sure. And so he asked, "Yes?"

"I asked whether you'd like just a transparent coat or-" Shen Ziyi didn't even have to finish her question. Luo Binghe's eyes were already lingering on her hands, looking longingly at her nails. She laughed. "Do you want me to draw something?"

"Bamboo," Luo Binghe breathed out. He turned to look once more at Shen Ziyi, eyes wide. "Can you.. paint bamboo?"

Shen Ziyi raised an eyebrow. "With pandas?"

"Just bamboo." Luo Binghe shook his head. "With.. blue, like the sky. And on top.. Bamboo. Blue.. green, blue," he tried to explain. Even pointing at specific parts where he wanted the bamboo to be painted. Saying once again, "Bamboo."

Her eyes seemed to be questioning but then she shrugged. Taking one hand in hers, she said, "Let's get you cleaned up."

Shen Ziyi did a very thorough job at cleaning his nails. She trimmed them with little silver thing Luo Binghe had never seen in his life, it seemed to be very sharp! He couldn't help but feel amazed at how easy she controlled the tiny, sharp object! He made a mental note to ask Shizun what that thing was called.

Shen Ziyi asked him many questions, but Luo Binghe was careful not to recklessly answer. He didn't know what kinds of information that were okay to disclose and which were not. Most questions were about Shen Yuan though. Most caught Luo Binghe off guard; blushing and almost jumping from his seat.

"Where did you two first meet?"

"Do you two always hold hands when you walk? I've been told that it was the case."

"What do you see in him even? Money? His pretty face?"

Shen Ziyi didn't even give him a chance to answer this one. Luo Binghe was prepared, okay! He was ready to tell her how good of a person his Shizun was, how selfless. How he had gotten him fall head over heels. How Luo Binghe would do anything to keep seeing his smile. It was not the money! The pretty face was a bonus! It was definitely not…..

"Is it because he's good in bed?"

Luo Binghe choked.

"Did you two kiss?"

Oh, how much he wanted to bang his head on the table.

“No sword fights, then?”

This time Luo Binghe sat up straight. This one, he could answer. With absolute clarity; “We’ve sparred.”

“Oh?” Shen Ziyi’s gaze was mischievous, hand momentarily stopping as she leaned closer. Intrigued. “Is he good?”

No one! Luo Binghe repeated, no one! Should ever look down on his Shizun’s swordsmanship!

And so he answered, “Very good.” A sure nod. Then, “The best.”

The answer was enough to make Shen Ziyi hummed in delight. Continuing her work with Luo Binghe’s nails as he tore his gaze away, suddenly feeling very conscious of his surroundings. Was he not supposed to say that? He hadn’t seen any swords ever since he woke up here. Was the sword skill thing supposed to be kept secret?

Was this place the so-called afterlife, even? Why was Luo Binghe feeling more alive here than ever?

What if they weren’t dead after all?

Then did that mean he just blew up Shizun’s cover? Was that why he still hadn’t come even after saying that he’d join him in a bit?

It had been long enough already! Too long!

Dread then settled upon him. He froze. Shen Ziyi seemed to notice because she stopped too. Asking, “What’s wrong?”

“Yuan gege,” Luo Binghe croaked out, making sure he hadn’t slipped up calling him Shizun. Feeling more helpless than ever at his current nonexistent power; could he even trust Shen Ziyi? She looked genuinely worried. Shizun seemed to trust her too! So he asked, “Where?”

At this, she scoffed. Pulling Luo Binghe’s hand closer to her as she went on buffing his nails. “Possessive much?” she asked, rolling her eyes. “He’ll come, he’ll come.”

She seemed to be very sure of herself, Luo Binghe couldn’t help but to trust her. He waited. Growing impatient as the time went on. Only relaxed once he heard the door swung open, revealing his Shizun who walked in and immediately threw himself on the bed.

Shen Ziyi shrieked in horror! Luo Binghe almost jumped.

“Shut up,” Shen Yuan muttered, all sprawled up on the pink sheet as he held up a little box—one that illuminated his face. Luo Binghe wondered what that was? Shen Yuan then added, “I’ll pay you more for the bed.”

That seemed to calm Shen Ziyi down. Didn't stop her from cursing though. Mumbling, "I don't like living with you, not at all. You stink."

Luo Binghe wanted so badly to defend his Shizun, but he didn't hear any.. malicious? intention behind those words. And when he glanced at Shen Yuan once more, his suspicion was confirmed.

There was a light smile on Shen Yuan's face as he spoke, voice sounding rather fondly; "The feeling is mutual."

"Old hag," she grunted.

"Brat," he replied.

The two didn't speak after that. The room was engulfed in silence, but Luo Binghe didn't mind. It was a comfortable one.

He decided then that he liked it here. Liked it very much.

Chapter End Notes

s sword..?:o

Chapter 5: bad thief!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luo Binghe kept glancing at the bed.

“He won’t disappear,” Shen Ziyi said, huffing as she tugged on Luo Binghe’s hand. “Stop looking at him longingly like that!”

Oh, she noticed? And here Luo Binghe thought he was being subtle about it.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

He heard his Shizun said. Once he turned to look at him this time, Shen Yuan was looking back at him. Luo Binghe was quick to avert his gaze.

He might.. have accidentally flinched. Because Shen Ziyi barked at her brother, “Get out! Can’t you see that you’re distracting him?”

It was all that it took for Luo Binghe to stop moving altogether. He sat up straight, face full with renewed determination as he spoke, “I will not look at gege. I will not be distracted.” He bit his lower lip then. Hesitating for a while before adding, “He can stay.”

Shen Yuan laughed, and it took everything in Luo Binghe not to look. Instead, he focused his attention on Shen Ziyi. Saying, “You can continue.”

“Good.” Shen Ziyi nodded, resuming her work. “You can do the swordplay shit later. He won’t go anywhere, that hag. You have all the time in the world!”

She.. told him to spar? He had no swords with him! Luo Binghe nodded nonetheless. “We will do the swordplay shit later,” he agreed, ignoring the choked out sound from his back. He will not! Be! Distracted! Shizun should stay. Shizun must stay!

It turned out to be a rather easy job.

Focusing on his nails as Shen Ziyi did her magic to them, Luo Binghe somehow felt relaxed. He knew his Shizun was still there. Waiting. Watching him, maybe? Or playing with that shining little box of his. Whatever he was doing, Luo Binghe felt assured that he was there with him.

He didn’t move, didn’t flinch; didn’t try to peek at Shen Yuan because he knew the older one would easily break his calm. Wouldn’t want to ruin Shen Ziyi’s hard work!

Shen Ziyi kept engaging him in a series of light conversations—ones that didn’t indulge Shen Yuan because they were talking about him like he *wasn’t* there, throughout the entire thing. And once she was done, she let him show his nails to his Shizun. Finally!

Luo Binghe still asked though, after he was done gawking at his new nails, “Can I look at gege now?”

Shen Ziyi rolled her eyes. She waved her hand dismissively as she said, “No one’s stopping you.”

Luo Binghe immediately turned his head. Wanting to call out for his Shizun but held himself back as he found Shen Yuan already looking at him. The gaze was.. intense. Luo Binghe didn’t know what to do.

So when Shen Yuan sat up and gestured for him to come, Luo Binghe rushed to his side. He held both his hands up in front of his Shizun’s face. Watching as his expression turned into.. Luo Binghe wasn’t sure. Did he not like it?

“Do you like it?” Shen Yuan asked, placing both of his hands under Luo Binghe’s. He looked up from where he was sitting on the bed, searching for the disciple’s eyes as he asked once more, “Binghe, do you like it?”

Luo Binghe nodded, although a bit hesitant. What kind of answer was he supposed to give?

He couldn’t even think of a better response, Shen Yuan had put one arm around his waist and yanked him to sit down on the space between his legs. Luo Binghe could feel his Shizun’s chin against his shoulder, could *feel* his laughter against his back—the way his body shook with it.

“Oh, God.” Shen Yuan was still laughing. He got one arm around Luo Binghe’s waist, his other hand placed under Luo Binghe’s palms. Supporting his hands as he leaned closer to take a better look. “Fuck. I never thought that you’d.. Oh.”

He couldn’t even finish his sentence! Face buried on Luo Binghe’s shoulder as his body continued to shake with laughter.

Luo Binghe didn’t move. Couldn’t move. Wouldn’t move!

“When I said swordplay later, I didn’t mean on my bed!” Shen Ziyi sounded exasperated. But who could blame her, really.

Luo Binghe was about to tell her that he didn’t have any swords with him when his Shizun beat him to it. Saying, “Stop teaching him bad things!” He pulled Luo Binghe even closer, almost protectively. Chin now rested back on his shoulder. Laughter all gone.

Please teach me more bad things!! Luo Binghe wanted to scream. Though he was not aware of what bad things Shizun was referring to? Didn’t matter anyway. *PLEASE! MORE! BAD! THINGS!*

“Says the main culprit.” Shen Ziyi sighed. She got that little box too in her hands, one resembling Shizun’s but in purple. Luo Binghe still didn’t know what that thing was, but Shen Ziyi seemed to be serious as she stared and tapped her fingers on it.

“What else do you like?” Shen Yuan asked, voice a little hushed. “Tell me, this old man can get you almost anything here.”

Luo Binghe didn’t dare to turn his face. Instead, he let himself bask in the familiar warmth. Leaning back against his Shizun’s chest as he shook his head. Saying, “I have everything that I need here.”

Shen Yuan made a disapproving sound. He shook the younger one a bit. “Yeah. But what do you like?” He tried asking again. “Anything you want to do or have that I haven’t known about. Tell me.”

Luo Binghe actually took his time thinking, but he couldn’t come up with any. He didn’t know! Also, wishing for more when he had already gotten.. these? All of these? What more could he ask for, really.

“I’ve sent you the bill,” said Shen Ziyi, finally putting that little purple box down on the table. She frowned when she looked at the room’s guests. Overstaying their welcome, it seemed! “Why are you two so gross.”

It wasn’t even a question. It was a statement!

Luo Binghe wanted to apologize, but the little box in his Shizun’s hand caught his attention. He asked instead, “Gege, what is that?”

“It’s a phone,” said Shen Yuan, thumb busy tapping on the shiny surface.

A phone!

Luo Binghe nodded as if he knew what the thing was for. He was immediately captivated though. So many colors.. And numbers.. And tiny texts.. The display kept changing!

He tore his gaze away from the phone when he heard his Shizun gasping behind him. Followed by an exclaim of: “I am robbed!”

Luo Binghe sprang up from the bed, almost ready to get on his defensive stance but staggered once Shen Yuan pulled him to sit back down. He stayed standing up though! In front of his Shizun! Whoever the thief was, they needed to fight him first before they could touch his Shizun! Which, Luo Binghe would make sure *no one* would be able to.

But it seemed like he was late?

Because his Shizun was already complaining about losing money! And Shen Ziyi was laughing, oh-so-gleefully! Was it at him and his inability to protect Shizun from thieves?!

“Binghe, sit back down.” Shen Yuan pulled him once more. This time, Luo Binghe obeyed. Feeling dejected as he plopped down quite far from Shen Yuan. He had no rights to claim that spot between his Shizun’s legs! No rights to lean against his chest! No longer!

He was, needless to say, sulking *real bad.* He missed having Shizun’s arms around him already.. If only he could catch the thief..

Shen Yuan seemed to know what the disciple was thinking about. He laughed, patting the side of Luo Binghe's head as he said, "It's fine, it's fine." His fingers then went through his hair, combing lightly. "A-Yi, can you give me that thing? The one you usually put around your wrist, for hair. But the fluffy one?"

"That thing got a name," Shen Ziyi protested. She still went to get it anyway, coming back to the bed with a box full of new, unused scrunchies. "It's called scrunchie! Take some, think of it as a bonus."

Shen Yuan snorted. As if she didn't ask for a *very* large sum of money just before! He nudged Luo Binghe nonetheless. Saying, "Choose."

Luo Binghe looked hesitant but he reached for one. Plain, soft green. The color reminded Shen Yuan of his robe back in Cang Qiong.

"Only one?" He asked once Luo Binghe turned to look at him. The younger one nodded. Shen Yuan chuckled softly as he took some more—black and red ones, before pushing the box lightly. "We'll take three."

"Sure." Shen Ziyi shrugged. She went to put the box back in its place, then turned around again to ask. "Do you need a brush?"

Shen Yuan sighed dreamily. Saying, "Aren't you just the best sister."

Shen Ziyi only shook her head to this. She handed him a hairbrush though. A brand new one, with pretty gradation of glittery green and silver. "What else?"

Oh, she was so used to this. That lazy brother of hers treated her room like a convenience store! He wouldn't hesitate barging in at the weirdest hours asking for tissues. Or soap. Or a toothbrush. Shaving cream, even! Just explained how much he *hated* going out. She got them all stocked.

"Toothbrush? And maybe soap? Shampoo too. And-"

And Shen Ziyi cut him off: "Just pick them up yourself!"

Shen Yuan grinned. Pulling Luo Binghe to stand up along with him, tugging him to the big, big bathroom where Shen Ziyi got a whole storage of toiletries. He made the disciple choose his own toothbrush before showing him how to open every type of soap bottle cap. "You sniff sniff like this," Shen Yuan said, demonstrating. Then he brought the bottle closer to Luo Binghe's nose. Closing the cap and putting it back on the shelf. "Take what you like. This too." He gestured at the shampoos.

Luo Binghe nodded. Shen Yuan chuckled, reaching for the little pink shopping basket he had kept there as a joke—Shen Ziyi was *very* annoyed when he first brought the toy to her room. *Shameless!* She had said. Though she did nothing to get rid of it anyway.

"Here, put it here." Shen Yuan put the scrunchies and hairbrush he held into the basket, gesturing for Luo Binghe to do the same with his new toothbrush and scrunchie. Luo Binghe

obeyed. He also took the basket from Shen Yuan's hand. Nodding when his Shizun said, "I'll wait outside."

His sister threw him an accusing look from where she was seated on the bed. Both arms crossed against her chest. Shen Yuan sighed, knowing that he needed to at least explain *why* he brought someone to the house.

"Things happened, alright?" Shen Yuan sighed once more, sitting down next to his sister.

"What things?" Shen Ziyi asked, voice a little hushed. "Explain!"

"It was.. complicated." The older one threw himself on the bed, lying down.

Shen Ziyi frowned, though she asked no further questions.

They waited in silence.

Once Luo Binghe finally came with the pink basket, Shen Yuan jumped up. Approaching him and took a look at what was inside. Laughing once he saw the exact shampoo and soap that he was actually using!

Shen Ziyi followed, looking at the basket contents too. She then looked up at Luo Binghe. "Why?"

The disciple avoided her gaze. Mumbling, "They're the closest that smell like gege.."

She knew it! But, God. Just how much she wanted to kick them out of her room! And so she did.

Though when they were about to walk out the door, Shen Ziyi grabbed her brother by the neck. "You go first," she said to Luo Binghe. Who, instead of going, only turned to look at his Shizun. Waiting for approval.

"Go back to my room first," he said, reaching to pry his sister's hand away from his neck. "You remember where that is, don't you?"

Luo Binghe seemed hesitant, but he nodded. Hugging the little pink basket to his chest as he took one last look at his Shizun. Then he left.

"Are you even serious?" Shen Ziyi asked right away, leaning on the doorframe.

Shen Yuan sighed at the question. "I told you things happened," he said, glancing at Luo Binghe's back. "I'll explain more later, I promise. Just give me.. time."

Shen Ziyi gave up rather easily. Though she asked, "Why don't you just let him use your stuff?"

She was referring to the soap and shampoo, Shen Yuan knew. He chuckled lightly. "I could if he wants to." Eyes focused on Luo Binghe's retreating figure as he spoke, "But it feels nice to have choices, don't you think?"

Again, Shen Ziyi gave up! Saying, “Go.”

Shen Yuan then turned to grin at her. “I am going,” he said, reaching to pat his sister’s head before catching up to the disciple.

Shen Ziyi could only sigh as she watched him. Mumbling, "And yet he chose you.."

Chapter End Notes

baby sheep 24/7 : MUST! PROTECT! SHIZUN!

Chapter 6: brain freeze?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The rest of Shen Yuan's day was spent answering a whole bunch of *Shizun, what is that?* from his curious disciple.

Luo Binghe had pointed at almost everything his eyes could find in the room, nodding excitedly at every answer he got.

In this world, humans can apparently shrink to fit into a television! What an interesting discovery. Luo Binghe wanted to know *more.*

"Do you want to go there?" Shen Yuan asked, gesturing at the television.

Luo Binghe gave him a thoughtful look. "Will Shizun be there too?"

Shen Yuan shrugged. "Sure," he said. "I mean, why not?"

Luo Binghe didn't look away for quite long, searching for any trace of dishonesty in his Shizun's eyes but ended up finding none. He nodded then. Standing up from the bed as he pulled Shen Yuan along with him, heading straight toward the television.

This, of course, had earned him a very *big* laugh from Shen Yuan. That man even fell down! Clutching his stomach as he just.. kept on laughing!

It was, Luo Binghe had to admit, a pretty sight. Shizun laughing so carefree like that. Though he didn't know what was so funny? And it was starting to worry him when his Shizun wheezed.

"Shizun?" Luo Binghe tried calling, but to no avail.

It took a while for Shen Yuan to calm down. And when he finally did, he asked, "Would you really go anywhere if I told you I'm going too?"

Luo Binghe nodded without a doubt.

Shen Yuan's smile was sad as he gestured for the disciple to sit down. Luo Binghe did, sitting down on the floor right in front of his Shizun.

"You used to be so small." Shen Yuan reached out, pressing his palm against Luo Binghe's cheek. "You used to fall into my arms during practice, remember?"

Of course he remembered! How could he not? It was all on purpose! He used to mess up all the moves just so he could get into his Shizun's arms.

"So trusting. As if I'd catch every time you throw yourself at me." Shen Yuan let out a soft chuckle as he patted the disciple's cheek. "Do you still fit in my arms, Binghe?"

Luo Binghe beamed up at this. This one was clearly an invitation, right? He crawled closer to his Shizun, and just.. threw himself. He knew his Shizun would catch him this time.

And Shen Yuan did. He caught him with ease; tucking the disciple's head under his chin as he squeezed him in his arms. "You've grown so much.."

Luo Binghe let himself be moved to sit on his Shizun's lap, arms reaching to wrap themselves around Shen Yuan as he buried his face on the crook of his neck.

He wanted this moment to last. He wanted to just hide himself in the safety of his Shizun's arms. He had dreamt of this—countless times, he had dreamt of the day reuniting with Shizun. He had been wishing for it. Desperately holding on to the sheer hope of.. this.

And when he heard a soft apology whispered out in his ear, Luo Binghe lost it.

He wanted to ask why, wanted to ask what had he done so wrong to deserve all the hardships he'd been through. But all he could manage was the choked out call for his Shizun. Shen Yuan responded by holding him tighter. Huddling him closer.

"You were just a kid.. You've been through so much," he whispered, resting his chin on the top of the disciple's head. "I was too worried for myself, I failed to consider how you're feeling. It must've been scary.. all alone."

Luo Binghe clutched on Shen Yuan as if his life depended on it. He then let the words slip out of his lips; that it was scary. That he was scared. He had no time to be scared back then, no time to grief. Right now in Shen Yuan's arms though, he let the feelings take over him.

"I should've jumped with you," said Shen Yuan, gently reaching to stroke the disciple's hair. "Binghe, you've been through so much.."

The rest was kind of a blur. Luo Binghe cried so much his chest hurt, Shen Yuan's soothing voice was the only thing that kept him grounded.

"Nothing will harm you here, I promise."

"I won't leave you alone. Not again."

"I'll make it up to you."

And he started rambling about things Luo Binghe hadn't heard. Amusement park? Arcade? Zoo? Ice cream? So many.. things. He promised them all though, and Luo Binghe nodded at each. Everything his Shizun was willing to give, he would take.

By the time he ran out of tears, Shen Yuan couldn't feel his legs. It took a moment for Luo Binghe to realize that his Shizun was hurting, though he was quick to move when he did. Worry gnawing all over his chest as he gave Shen Yuan a massage.

It was so quick—the shift of emotions on the disciple's face. Shen Yuan couldn't help but to pinch those cheeks. "Worrying about me already?"

Luo Binghe's reply was incoherent as he kept on massaging his Shizun's legs. He promised he would lose weight, to which Shen Yuan quickly dismissed.

"I'll feed you so much until I can nom on those cheeks." He pinched the disciple's cheeks some more. "You have to know that I have no restraint here."

With the amount of curses and laughter he'd been hearing throughout the day, Luo Binghe realized that one already. The physical touches. The promises. No restraint at all, it seemed.

So when Shen Yuan finally managed to stand up and dragged him to the kitchen, Luo Binghe was blushing so bad he felt warm all over.

Shen Yuan had tried lifting the disciple up to put him on the counter, but he seemed to be having some.. difficulties with that. It ended up with Luo Binghe pushing himself up, sitting on the counter.

"I need to hit the gym." Shen Yuan sighed, rummaging through the fridge.

Luo Binghe didn't know what the gym had done wrong, but he offered anyway; "I will help."

Shen Yuan laughed. It was a really pretty sound, Luo Binghe could never get enough.

He kept going back and forth from the fridge, putting all the snacks he could get on the counter before settling himself on the space between the disciple's legs.

He seemed to be serious about wanting to nom on his cheeks? Because he just kept.. feeding him!

Luo Binghe was munching on strawberry cookies when Shen Yuan introduced him to another. "This one, you dip the stick here," he said, showing him how to before holding it up to his lips. Luo Binghe gladly ate.

Then before he could even swallow, Shen Yuan already held up a spoon. "Ice cream," he said. Eyes wide as he looked up at Luo Binghe. Expectant.

How could Luo Binghe say no to those eyes?! Of course he ate! A spoonful of ice cream, he could manage! The ice cream looked soft, Luo Binghe was pretty sure it could fit just fine in his mouth.

Though when he closed his lips around the spoon, taking the ice cream into his mouth, he.. froze. It was a big chunk, alright! And it was *really* cold. Like ice! But sweet ice! Was that why it was called *ice* cream?

It was, after all, a late realization.

He didn't know whether to spit it out, to swallow, or try to munch. Heck, even the spoon was still there! Shen Yuan seemed to sense his panic. He gently pulled the spoon away. Asking,

"Brain freeze?"

Before the disciple could answer, Shen Yuan already pulled him to lean closer. "Here, let me warm you up real quick." And just like that, he kissed his forehead!

Luo Binghe swallowed! And reached for the spoon! And scooped some more ice cream! Lots of it. He frowned as he put it into his mouth. But his gaze stayed on Shen Yuan. Full of hope.

Shen Yuan, who seemed to be surprised at the disciple's antics, chuckled as he put his arms loosely around Luo Binghe's waist. He then stood up on his tiptoes, placing yet another kiss on the disciple's forehead. "Better?" He asked once he pulled away.

Luo Binghe swallowed once more. He then set the spoon away, leaning on his Shizun. Face flush against his shoulder as he spoke, "Shizun, don't wake me up.."

"Are you sleepy?" He asked, thumb caressing the disciple's waist. "Should we head back to bed?"

"Isn't this a dream.."

Luo Binghe's voice was small, a bit muffled too. Shen Yuan heard it just fine though. And he had to tell him. Had to tell the disciple that this wasn't a dream. That he would be here for real.

"Binghe, I'm here." His voice was soft as he spoke. Pressing his lips gently against the disciple's forehead before pulling away to search for his eyes. "No more leaving you alone this time, alright?"

"..No more?" Luo Binghe asked, hands clutching on the fabric of his Shizun's top.

“No more,” Shen Yuan promised.

And when Luo Binghe threw himself back into his arms, he caught him.

Chapter End Notes

so more crying bingbing.. and shizun's late realization that the protagonist was just, after all, *a boy.*

Chapter 7: counting sheep

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Binghe, I could see your tail wagging all the way from here."

Luo Binghe stopped moving. He then turned to look at his Shizun. Eyes wide.

"I have a tail?" He asked, trying to take a look at his backside and ended up walking in circles. “Shizun, I grow a tail?”

Shen Yuan groaned. “What are you! A puppy?”

Luo Binghe stopped. This time wrinkling his nose as he focused his attention back on Shen Yuan. “I don’t see tails?”

“That’s because you don’t have any, you silly.” Shen Yuan sighed. He crawled to the edge of the bed before sitting with his feet down, gesturing for the disciple to come. “Take the brush and sit here, I’ll help you with your hair.”

Luo Binghe obliged. He handed the brush to his Shizun before sitting down on the floor, folding both of his legs to hug them against his chest.

“Do you like cooking with Granny that much?” Shen Yuan took off the disciple’s red scrunchie. He had helped him tie his hair when Luo Binghe offered himself to help Granny for dinner. The disciple had been buzzing with excitement ever since, with Shen Ziyi and Granny’s praises adding fuel to the fire.

“Mm.” Luo Binghe softly hummed, resting his cheek on his knees. “Dinner was fun.”

Shen Yuan took the disciple’s hair between his fingers and gave it a light tug, chuckling lightly. “You’re doing great.”

Luo Binghe looked up, head moving so fast it bumped against his Shizun’s knees. His gaze was unfaltering though. “I am?”

“The food was good,” said Shen Yuan, shrugging. “Granny seems to like having you in the kitchen too, I’m afraid she’d ask you to help more.”

“I don’t mind,” Luo Binghe replied. Adding not long after, a questioning lilt in his voice, “..If Shizun is okay with that?”

“You wanna cook?”

The question was immediately answered by a nod.

“Then you can cook.”

Shen Yuan had to cover the disciple’s eyes to shield himself from all the awestruck stares. “Up,” he said, free hand reaching to push Luo Binghe’s head off his lap. “How do I brush your hair like this?”

"I'm sorry," Luo Binghe mumbled, sitting up straight.

"Don't be." Shen Yuan gave the disciple's head a light pat before starting to brush his hair. "Do you want to sleep with your hair down?"

The disciple nodded. He took the scrunchie his Shizun offered, slipping it to his wrist. Shen Ziyi had taught him to keep the thing there.

Once they finished, Shen Yuan moved to sit in front of his study desk. Fetching a book and a pen, writing things down. Luo Binghe watched him.

"What are you doing?" He ended up asking. He tried not to peek. But when his Shizun shifted a bit, as if letting him know that it was okay to take a look, Luo Binghe gave in to the temptation. Peeking behind his Shizun's shoulder.

"Writing down three good things that happened throughout the day," Shen Yuan answered. "To wind down before sleep. A-Yi told me to, kinda surprising how it actually works."

"Oh?" Luo Binghe got down on his knees, fingers gripping on the table as his eyes followed the move of his Shizun's hand. "I see my name!"

"I wrote your name." Shen Yuan chuckled, putting his pen down before pushing the note closer to the disciple. Letting him read.

Luo Binghe's eyes scanned over the handwriting.

Three good things :

1. I'm still alive.

2. Fought with yiyi today.

3. Ate granny's cookings (+binghe's)

Tomorrow's to-do list :

1-3. Anything binghe wants to do

"Anything I want to do?" He looked up at his Shizun, eyes widening as his Shizun chuckled and reached to pat his head.

"Do you want to write your own?" Shen Yuan asked, already reaching for a spare new note. He stood up then, patting the chair. Luo Binghe climbed up, eyes never leaving the blank paper as he took the pen.

"Use this to write," Shen Yuan said. Then he tapped the paper. "Three good things that made you happy, three things you want to do tomorrow."

Luo Binghe's grip on the pen was awkward, but he got used to it quite fast. Copying the way he saw his Shizun held it before. "Does it have to be only three?" He asked after writing the title. "What if I have many?"

"Keep it down to three," Shen Yuan said, heading back toward the bed. He turned on the television before getting his legs under the blanket, back rested against the headboard.

Luo Binghe turned his head to look at his Shizun. Asking, "Why?"

That was the rule Shen Ziyi gave him. But knowing the disciple wouldn't be satisfied with the answer, he tilted his head to think.

Then he answered, "There are days where it's hard to just come up with one."

"When you have many, just write down the big idea." Seeing the frown on the disciple's face, Shen Yuan chuckled. Offering, "You can look at mine for reference?"

That seemed to do the trick.

The room was silent for a while, with only the television sound as the background noise. Shen Yuan almost dozed off when Luo Binghe asked, "Shizun, is water scarce here?"

"Hm?" Shen Yuan fixed his position, rubbing the sleep off his eyes as his mind registered the question. "No?"

"I see you wrote bath for quite many days in your three good things," the disciple said, not even turning to look as he flipped the pages. Eager to read more.

Upon hearing this, Shen Yuan huffed a soft laughter. "That's because I don't know what to write."

Luo Binghe frowned, not asking another question as he finally closed the book. Writing down his own three good things and to-do list.

He held the book close to his chest once he was done, setting the pen down before approaching his Shizun. The television distracted him though. He sat down on the edge of the bed, still holding his book. Eyes focused on the television screen.

Then another round of *Shizun, what is that?* started.

Every time Shen Yuan thought he could drift off to sleep, the disciple would point at the screen. Asking. And he answered them all, despite the sleepiness trying to take over him.

He didn't normally sleep this early, but today was.. a long day. So many things happened all at once. It was good though. He knew it would be the kind of sleep that would embrace him warm; not one of his restless ones.

By the.. Shen Yuan lost count, but by *this* question, he gave up. "Binghe," he called. "Would you help this old man counting sheep?"

The disciple finally turned to look at him. Overflowing with energy. Eager to help. "Where?"

"Here," Shen Yuan said, gesturing for the disciple to stand up. Luo Binghe obeyed. "Jump."

He looked a bit lost for a second before finally jumping up.

"One," said Shen Yuan. Looking at Luo Binghe as the disciple stopped and stared. Then he jumped again. "Two."

At the realization that the sheep was *him,* Luo Binghe kept jumping up and down as his Shizun counted.

"I've heard counting sheep before bed could help you have a peaceful sleep," Shen Yuan rambled. "Five."

Upon hearing this, of course Luo Binghe hopped with all his might! If it could help his Shizun, he would be happy to provide! He started to count along with him.

The excitement slowly died down nearing thirty.

By the time it reached thirty one, Shen Yuan slid down from the headboard, lifting up the blanket as he lay on his side. "Come. I have thirty three sheep."

Luo Binghe was panting. As much as he loved helping his Shizun, this turned out to be more.. tiring than he had expected. He climbed onto the bed and crawled to get into the blanket, immediately snuggling up to his Shizun. Mumbling, "It does make you sleepy.."

He handed the note that he was holding to Shen Yuan, letting himself be gathered into his Shizun's arms along with the blanket.

"It does?" Shen Yuan asked, sounding surprised. He was laughing though. Luo Binghe could feel the way his body shook.

Luo Binghe nodded, stifling a yawn as he closed his eyes. Letting sleep take over him.

As Shen Yuan was about to sleep, he decided taking a look at the disciple's note wouldn't hurt. So he did.

And found…

Three good things :

1. Shizun

2. Nails a-yi

3. Cook granny

Tomorrow's to-do list :

1. Shizun

2. Shizun

3. Shizun

...Maybe Shen Yuan should run. Before the morning came. Quick.

But as he closed the book and turned his attention back to the sleeping disciple, he knew he had to stay.

He wanted to stay.

And so he stayed.

Chapter End Notes

A little self-indulgent note that: I started to write this because I wanted SY to write down his three good things list with ease. It feels great, you see. When you know exactly what kept you going throughout the day.... And that was how this piece was born! ((is emotional)))))))) but hey i love these two babies so much pls bear with me as i shower them with all the love i cOULD GIVE. Which would end this note with a content warning: ⚠️ more fluffs ahead.

Chapter 8: soooo nice

A pair of eyes were staring back at him the moment he woke up. Fingers hovering right over his cheek, hesitant to touch.

Shen Yuan blinked.

Luo Binghe let out a shuddering breath.

Then came the question, "Shizun, do you like this body?"

Shen Yuan rolled away so fast he almost fell.

What was that supposed to mean?!

He turned his face in time to see the hurt that flashed over the disciple's face. Luo Binghe was quick to tear his gaze away; the hand he held up balled into a fist as he pulled it close to his chest.

"This lowly one apologizes," the disciple said. "This lowly one would not lay his dirty hands on Shizun."

Shen Yuan frowned. Not liking what he just heard, he scooted closer. "Hey," he said, reaching for Luo Binghe's chin. Gently guiding the disciple to face him. "Did something happen while I sleep?"

Luo Binghe was expressionless when he looked at him. Under his Shizun's concerned gaze though, his lips slightly trembled. "I had.. a dream," he managed to say.

"Nightmare?" Shen Yuan's hand moved to cup the disciple's cheek, thumb brushing over his cheekbone.

The disciple shook his head and Shen Yuan gave him an encouraging nod, silently telling him he'd listen.

"It's- Shizun.. showing up different. With this face. That's a first." Luo Binghe's voice sounded small when he spoke. "But then I woke up.. and Shizun's holding me. Still with this face. The painting on my nails are still there too."

He leaned into his Shizun's touch. "I'm still dreaming, aren't I?"

"Did the dream involve you cooking with Granny?"

Luo Binghe nodded.

"You wrote down your three good things and to-do list? Fell asleep counting sheep?"

The disciple's eyes widened. The nod looked hesitant this time.

"And your today's to-do list would be me, me, me?"

Now an eager nod.

"You have to explain that one," Shen Yuan added in his firmest tone. Then he sighed, gaze softening as he spoke, "But no, silly. You're not dreaming."

"I'm not dreaming?"

Shen Yuan patted the disciple's cheek. Asking, "What did I tell you to call me here?"

"Gege," the disciple croaked out.

"What am I going to do after feeding you tons of tasty foods?" He asked again.

"Nom on my cheeks?" The disciple offered, face flushing. Then he asked, "Not a dream? They were real?"

Shen Yuan huffed. Pinching the disciple's cheek as he affirmed, "Very real."

He could see how Luo Binghe's body relaxed at that. "When I woke up, I wanted to.. make sure," the disciple said, gaze falling to his fist. Slowly opening his fingers before looking up at his Shizun. "I didn't dare to."

Shen Yuan gave him a contemplating look. "Were you waiting for me to wake up to touch my face?"

Luo Binghe didn't say a thing. Shen Yuan caught that though; the fear in his eyes.

He slid his hand down the disciple's arm, catching his hand.

"Have I told you you have such pretty hands?" Shen Yuan asked, bringing the disciple's hand slightly up. "And look at those nails! So pretty."

"How are *these* dirty?" He then asked, almost scolding. "They're not dirty."

He guided the hand close to his face. Letting warm, calloused palm rest against his cheek. The disciple's breath hitched, hand slightly shaking.

"Go on," Shen Yuan said, letting the hold go as he turned his face a bit. Pressing his lips against the disciple's palm. "You can touch."

Luo Binghe's touch was hesitant. Fingers slowly tracing every inch of his Shizun's face, careful enough not to hurt him.

Shen Yuan snorted. "You like it?" He asked, wanting to throw a joke about how shocking it must've been at the change. Shen Qingqiu's face was a hundred times better! Poor disciple, stuck with this version of master!

But then Luo Binghe nodded, looking a bit dazed. A soft smile made its way to his lips. Slowly looking up to search for his Shizun's eyes, the back of his fingers now caressing his cheek.

And Shen Yuan's eyes suddenly felt warm.

No one.. had ever looked at him like that. The adoration; the relief of being able to touch him. To look at him. It caught him off guard. An odd tug at his heartstrings.

"What's there to like about my face?" He asked before he could stop himself.

And Luo Binghe's answer came without a single doubt, "It's Shizun's."

--

It took a whole week of convincing.

Luo Binghe would wake up afraid. In his Shizun's arms. Shen Yuan would have to recount the disciple's three good things and to-do list for the day to convince him that it wasn't a dream.

Then Luo Binghe would look at him like he held the universe in his hands.

It was.. overwhelming.

Shen Yuan had learned to receive though, to bask himself in the now familiar warmth.

They would spend their mornings idling about. They'd fall asleep some more, only waking up to the brutal knock on the door and Shen Ziyi shouting about how too many sword fights could kill. *At least have some lunch, you horny bastards!*

Then they would finally go out of the room for lunch, with Luo Binghe explaining how he would never harm *his Yuan gege* with his sword. And how gege would be strong enough to fight back with his own sword.

Alright, maybe Shen Yuan should've stopped that. But the look of horror on Shen Ziyi's face?! Priceless.

He would just nod along to the disciple's every word. Agreeing that his sword was, indeed, very strong. The triumphant smile on Luo Binghe's face served as the solid proof.

She learned her lesson not to mention *any swords* by the third day.

They *didn't* have sword fights, alright? Luo Binghe had even asked his Shizun why Shen Ziyi was so obsessed with that. When he hadn't even seen a single sword ever since he arrived! Shen Yuan had only shrugged.

Luo Binghe would make the bed, prepare his Shizun's bath, clean the room, and cook for dinner. Shen Yuan told him not to overdo, that he already had people to do the tasks. Luo Binghe insisted that he wanted to.

Shen Yuan would spoil him then: agreeing to his every *Shizun, can we-* as they wrote their to-do list by the end of the day. It was a comforting routine. Sitting together on the bed with the books on their lap, writing down the shared activities and planning for the next day—with the disciple's ever present *with shizun* scribbled at the end of each.

One day he asked, "Shizun, can we drink tea with pearls?"

Shen Yuan had turned serious—explaining that yes, he had the money; but no, pearls were not meant to be eaten. He could, instead, have them as jewelry and asked whether the disciple would like a necklace. Luo Binghe quickly shook his head, along with the idea of drinking pearls.

Shen Yuan ended up asking Shen Ziyi whether there were edible pearls though, with how much the girl had affected the disciple's to-do list with stuff he hadn't even heard.

And the tea with pearls turned out to be.. bubble tea. The question also earned him a big smack on the head and an accusing shriek of, "You don't let him drink boba?!" More smacks. Shen Ziyi thought it was unacceptable and ordered the drinks herself. Luo Binghe loved it.

The disciple turned out to be very active at night. Shen Yuan had put the blame on the stallion protag nature.

No sisters around and you're stuck with this old man! What's there to do with that amount of energy? Hop around and count some sheep! was how it went in his head.

What he let out though, "Should we count some sheep?" with a suppressed smile. Knowing fully that the disciple would agree.

By the fourth day, Luo Binghe had started jumping without Shen Yuan even asking. It took less and less jumps each day, Shen Yuan noticed.

And now on the seventh day, Luo Binghe looked sleepy before he even started jumping! Energy well spent on the desserts he made with Granny.

One jump was all that it took for Shen Yuan to pull the disciple into his arms, blanket safely wrapped around him.

Luo Binghe didn't protest. He asked though, "Shizun, why do I get tired so easily now?"

Upon hearing this, Shen Yuan let out a soft chuckle. Saying, "You're supposed to get tired."

"But sometimes it's full right here." The disciple tapped his own chest.

"Then let it out," Shen Yuan replied. Luo Binghe's eyes were closed when he pulled away to look at the disciple. He still let out the words though; "When you're happy, you laugh. When you're sad, cry."

The disciple whined. Still not falling asleep, it seemed. Snuggling up to his Shizun as he asked, "What if I'm soooo happy my tears come out?"

"Then let them out."

"It's okay to cry when you're happy?"

Shen Yuan squeezed the disciple in his arms. Whispering, "It's okay to cry whenever."

"Then I'm gonna cry right now," Luo Binghe declared.

It was.. very endearing, Shen Yuan couldn't hold back his smile. "Aren't you sleepy?" He asked.

"I'm gonna cry because it's soooo nice." The disciple ignored the question, actually *sniffling* into his Shizun's chest. "It feels so nice.."

Shen Yuan sighed. "What do I do with you.."

"Hold me," the disciple sniffled some more.

"I'm holding you," he replied, holding him close.

"Don't let go.."

"I won't."

Shen Yuan didn't let go.

It only took a while for the disciple to calm down though. Nuzzling against his Shizun's chest, getting snot and tears all over his pajamas as he announced, "I'm gonna sleep."

Shen Yuan chuckled and held the disciple even closer, placing a gentle kiss on the top of his head. "Please do."

The next morning, Luo Binghe no longer asked whether he was dreaming.

Chapter 9: three meals a day!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Can I have a bite?"

Luo Binghe nodded. He was about to offer his Shizun the fork when his cheek got bitten.

Oh.

He meant the cheeks!

Luo Binghe got pulled closer. Another bite. Followed by a soft peck on his temple.

Alright, maybe he should've gotten used to all the kisses by now. But he could feel his face getting warm! And the way his Shizun laughed—as if confirming that he was indeed *very* red, just made it worse!

He hid his face on Shen Yuan's shoulder.

Then came another peck! And another! More!! Kisses attack!!

Not healthy!!

Luo Binghe whined.

"How's the cake?" Shen Yuan finally asked, now nuzzling on the disciple's hair. "Do you like it?"

Upon hearing the question, Luo Binghe slowly pulled away. He nodded. Taking a glance at the plate of strawberry cheesecake on his lap before saying, "But I like the one Shizun bought yesterday better."

"Oh. The lemon cake?" Shen Yuan tilted his head, looking at the disciple with a fond smile on his face. "You like that better?"

One look at his Shizun was all that it took for Luo Binghe to nod.

It was hard at first, admitting what he liked and what he didn't.

His Shizun had been giving him so many foods to try! Luo Binghe couldn't be more grateful, really. But some foods were just not to his liking. He loathed wasting food though, especially the ones given by his Shizun. He wouldn't want to waste any!

The first time went unnoticed.

Though the second time, he got caught.

It was another snack trying time, Luo Binghe had chosen something from his Shizun's phone just because it looked green.

It was very pretty! Shen Ziyi said the ice cream flavor name was mint chocolate. Even the name sounded pretty! Nothing could go wrong, right? Besides, he had learned how to enjoy ice cream the right way! No more brain freeze.

Though when he finally tried, it took a very long time for him to swallow; with the taste reminding him of something his Shizun had *strictly* told him not to swallow. It tasted like toothpaste!

The struggle seemed to be visible all over his face because Shen Yuan had stopped him from taking another bite. Saying, "I think there's still some chocolate ice cream left in the fridge?"

Luo Binghe didn't want to waste food! He didn't think he could finish *this* even after eating the tasty chocolate ice cream! He was about to politely decline when Shen Yuan took the spoon from his hand.

The disciple's eyes widened when his Shizun ate from the spoon he used.

"Can I have more?" Shen Yuan asked, though his hand already brought the cup closer to himself. Luo Binghe could only nod. Flushing red as his Shizun casually ate some more. From *his* spoon! Luo Binghe's spoon!

The next few times were like that too. Shen Yuan would just take the foods Luo Binghe didn't like—that the disciple said he *liked* though the slight wince said otherwise, and finish them himself.

Then one time before Luo Binghe could take another bite of something he said *he really liked* (he actually didn't), Shen Yuan caught his wrist. "You know," he said, taking the chopsticks away from the disciple. He didn't eat the food right away this time, only putting them back down on the plate. "It was a late realization.."

The disciple was already looking at him the moment he looked up. Shen Yuan smiled, taking Luo Binghe's hand as he continued, "But I realize now that talking could actually resolve a lot of things." His gaze then fell to the disciple's hand, thumb gently tracing the scar on his palm. "Can we at least not lie about how we're feeling?"

The room was then engulfed in silence, with Shen Yuan's smile looking more sad as the time passed.

Luo Binghe's fingers slowly closed around his Shizun's thumb. "I don't.. like," he finally let out. Voice small. "The taste is not to my liking.."

And the look on his Shizun's face that time had encouraged him to speak more of his thoughts.

So this time, when Shen Yuan fished out his phone and asked whether he wanted the same lemon cake from yesterday, Luo Binghe nodded. But then he hesitated. Stopping his Shizun's

hand from scrolling down the menu as he said, “But not today.”

Luo Binghe could see the cake on his Shizun’s phone! It was only a slice yesterday, but he couldn't stop thinking about it. Even the mere sight of it already made him drool! He bit his lower lip.

“Not today?” Shen Yuan asked, turning his gaze to look at the disciple.

“Or maybe..” the disciple started, voice gradually getting smaller as he spoke, “If Shizun is willing to help this one finish his strawberry cheesecake then.. maybe.. there would still be room for the lemon cake…?”

Shen Yuan bursted out into laughter. He took the plate from the disciple’s lap though, moving it onto his own. “Very well,” he said once his laughter died down. Face turning serious. “This master is willing.”

Luo Binghe knew his Shizun was teasing him! With that *I-am-a-peak-lord* tone and *that* face! He was about to scold when his Shizun’s face broke into a grin. Luo Binghe lost all his words. Unfair!

“Should we order a whole cake?” Shen Yuan asked, now back to his usual voice. He shifted closer to the disciple, showing his phone screen. “This one? We can have some today and put the rest in the fridge for tomorrow.”

Luo Binghe nodded.

It seemed like it was not enough though. Shen Yuan searched for the disciple’s eyes as he asked, “You’d like that?”

The disciple once again nodded. This time shyly adding, “Yes.. please.”

Shen Yuan’s smile looked so genuine, it made Luo Binghe’s chest want to burst. So full! Very warm too.

They ended up ordering the whole cake.

Shen Yuan finished the disciple’s strawberry cheesecake as they waited, snuggled up to each other on the couch with Harry Potter playing on the television screen.

The movie franchise was one of Shen Yuan’s favorites. He could never get tired from watching all by himself over and over again, though this time he found out that he didn’t mind the company. He liked it. Even though this company of his could be a little chatty.

He had heard *Shizun, what is that?* at least ten times throughout what felt like the first five minutes into the movie. He answered them all anyway.

“Shizun, people fly on brooms here?” the disciple asked.

“No,” Shen Yuan answered. Adding, “We can’t also make objects fly by pointing a stick at it.”

“But people also don’t fly on swords?”

“No.”

“Then how do people fly?”

Shen Yuan took his time to answer. Tilting his head as he finally spoke, “We have planes.”

“Planes?”

“Mm. An airplane. It’s a big thing that can fly, many people can fit in one.” Looking at the disciple’s confused face, Shen Yuan let out a soft chuckle. Providing more description, “It has wings.”

The disciple’s eyes widened. “It’s a bird?”

Not knowing how to answer, Shen Yuan only shrugged. “You could say that,” he said.

Luo Binghe seemed to be satisfied with his answer, looking at the way he nodded and turned to focus back on the movie. Mumbling to himself, “It’s a very big bird then..”

Shen Yuan couldn’t hold back his smile.

He also found out that watching the disciple’s expression turned out to be more interesting than watching the movie itself. Shen Yuan strongly believed that the sole cause of this would be: he watched Harry Potter for way too much already. He remembered every scene by heart! Luo Binghe’s face though, he didn’t really have time to map out those tiny shifts of expression before. He got all the time now!

And yes, the blame was still on *too much* watching Harry Potter. It was definitely *not* because he wanted to look at the disciple’s face! No.

Luo Binghe was very excited when the cake came, though he tried not to show it as he waited patiently for his Shizun to cut the cake. He beamed when he finally got the plate on his lap. Shen Yuan thought it was an endearing sight.

He patted the disciple’s head.

They were halfway through the second movie when Granny asked whether Luo Binghe wanted to join her in the kitchen. The disciple immediately sprang up, not even taking a glance at his Shizun as he excitedly followed Granny out of the living room.

And just like that, Shen Yuan got ditched!

It was already settled between them that cooking was okay; Luo Binghe didn’t need to ask first to do this one. He liked cooking! Granny had taught him a lot! He also *loved* watching his Shizun’s face each time he tried the food he made.

Luo Binghe had even started to sneak out of the room early in the morning too! Dragging his Shizun out of bed once breakfast was prepared. Granny had praised him for that.

“Three meals a day,” Granny had said.

“Three meals a day,” Luo Binghe agreed.

Shen Yuan didn’t seem to mind, eating well despite all the groans and those *five more minuuuutes* Luo Binghe had to listen to every morning. He’d get up anyway, clinging to the disciple; most of the time taking his first bites still with his eyes closed. Then he’d pat Luo Binghe’s head, telling him he did well. The disciple would just nuzzle against his Shizun’s palm before reminding him to eat more.

So sleepy and clingy Shizun for breakfast. Rich I-can-get-you-any-snacks Shizun for lunch. Calm and full of praises Shizun for dinner. Three meals a day indeed, the disciple couldn’t be more well-fed!

This time though..

Luo Binghe had just finished preparing dinner when he came back to an empty living room.

Shen Yuan was no longer there, the television was off too. The disciple then went to their room. But he couldn’t find his Shizun there either! Dark and empty bathroom. Not in the walk-in closet. Not even under the bed!

The disciple had searched the room thoroughly, but his Shizun was nowhere in sight.

It was a huge place, but the disciple had only ever been to his Shizun’s room, Shen Ziyi’s room, the living room, then kitchen and the dining room.

Kitchen and dining room were out of the question. Not in the living room. Not even in his own bedroom. Luo Binghe had never run here before, but his body seemed to move on its own. He ran to Shen Ziyi’s room! Not even knocking as he swung the door open.

“Gege..?”

Shen Ziyi only blinked confusedly at the uninvited guest.

Luo Binghe asked again, “Gege?”

Shen Ziyi frowned.

Luo Binghe started to panic. He approached Shen Ziyi’s bed, voice almost sounding desperate now as he spoke, “Gege..”

The girl sighed.

What was the sigh supposed to mean?! Luo Binghe was *devastated!*

His mind couldn’t form any questions though. No explanations either.

He got on his knees, eyes getting teary as he tried one more time, “Gege?”

Shen Ziyi massaged her temples. Sighing once again before saying, “I don’t stink.” She wrinkled her nose. “Look, I know we’re related and all. But I’m like, much. Prettier.” Shen Ziyi gestured at her own face. “I think you also got into the wrong room.”

Luo Binghe shook his head. “Gege.” And before the girl could get any more wrong ideas, the disciple added, “Where?”

“Oh. You mean *where?”* Shen Ziyi asked, getting up from her bed. She pulled Luo Binghe to stand up as she spoke, “You know, there was a time he refused to get a haircut and everyone said we look alike! Worst time of my life. Why do you look so heartbroken?”

Luo Binghe would love to hear more stories of tiny Shizun, but Shen Ziyi wasn’t answering him right now! And he needed an answer! “Where?” he asked once more.

The girl frowned. Asking, “He’s not in his room?”

Luo Binghe shook his head, letting himself be guided out of the room. Shen Ziyi stayed by his side though. Walking through the hallway then down the stairs.

“That’s weird,” Shen Ziyi muttered. “That man never leaves his room. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him willingly go out of the room too before you came.”

Alright, not helping. More reasons to panic.

“We’ll find him,” said Shen Ziyi, patting his arm. “Did you two fight?”

Luo Binghe immediately shook his head. No?! They were fine just before!

“We’ll find him,” she said once more. Tone assuring.

And they *did* find him.

Luo Binghe wasn’t ready for this though.

Shizun. Tight.. pants? Is that even pants! Too short. Too tight. Too..

Luo Binghe wanted to dive into the water.

But the thought that his Shizun had just been… there. In the water. Looking like *that?* He wouldn’t dare to jump! Shen Ziyi only rolled her eyes and left the indoor swimming pool once her job was done.

Luo Binghe’s thoughts were in a muddle. For a pretty different reason this time, he knew. He could feel the warmth creeping up his face! He could.. He..

“Dinner’s ready?” Shen Yuan asked, drying his hair with a towel as he approached the disciple.

Luo Binghe tried his best not to look down at his chest. He kept his gaze as steady as he could, giving his Shizun a curt nod to answer.

Shen Yuan smiled, and Luo Binghe could swear his heart just skipped a beat.

So today’s dinner : a wet Shizun.

Three meals a day, three meals a day.

Luo Binghe sure was well-fed.

Chapter End Notes

eyes, binghe.. eyes..

Chapter 10: thESE ARE BABY TEETH?!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He did *not* sulk.

At least that was what Shen Yuan had been telling—no, *convincing* himself. He did not sulk.

He did not sulk at the sudden emptiness of this suddenly too big living room.

He did not sulk at the sudden lack of interest for this favorite movie of his playing on the screen.

He definitely did *not* sulk at the sudden disappearance of a certain disciple—one that didn't even spare his Shizun a glance when he left the room.

He! Did! Not! Sulk!

Shen Yuan did not sulk, though he could use some water to cool his head off. And so for the first time in a very long while: he swam.

The sudden swimming session did help, but the sight of Luo Binghe soothed his heart better.

Shen Yuan was back to his usual self by dinner. Munching happily on his food; the sour, sulky feelings all forgotten.

Maybe he should stop rewatching Harry Potter? Yeah. He probably needed a new movie. Luo Binghe had agreed to accompany him watch the whole series though..

And so he asked, "Can we watch something else tomorrow?"

Luo Binghe was right next to him, lying down on his stomach with a pen between his lips. A new habit of his.

Shen Yuan frowned. "Stop that," he said, prying the disciple's hand away from his mouth. "Are the foods not enough? Why do you keep chewing on your pen!"

Seeming to only realize what he was doing, Luo Binghe's eyes widened. Shen Yuan was already cupping his cheek before he could answer. Pulling him closer.

"You have itchy gums? Should I get you a teether?" Shen Yuan was still frowning, moving his hand down a bit to press his thumb against the disciple's lower lip. "Open. Let me see."

Luo Binghe did as he was told. "Gums can itch?" He asked once Shen Yuan was done looking. "I don't remember ever having my gums itchy."

"You probably don't remember," said Shen Yuan, waving his hand dismissively. Because.. right. Why would he even think of teething! Luo Binghe wasn't his eight months old baby niece—he wouldn't drool and bite everything he could put in his mouth just because his gums were itchy. He wasn't a baby!

He was curious about one thing though. Shen Yuan had watched this white lotus grow up *twice;* he was pretty sure the original protagonist was never mentioned to have a toothless phase in the book. The Luo Binghe he knew was already old enough with pretty, pearly teeth when he transmigrated.

He missed the chance to see little Binghe with his front tooth missing! Must've been an adorable sight, Shen Yuan thought.

"When did your baby teeth stop falling out?" He ended up asking.

Luo Binghe only blinked. Almost looking horrified at the question.

The silence stretched for long enough Shen Yuan had to ask, "They don't fall out?"

Luo Binghe shook his head.

Now Shen Yuan was the one horrified!

He pulled the disciple even closer by the chin. "You're telling me these are baby teeth?" He pinched his chin, making the disciple part his lips. *"These?"*

"Teeth are supposed to fall out?" Luo Binghe asked. Adding not long after, voice sounding small, "..on their own?"

“On their own!” Shen Yuan exclaimed, face turning serious as he slipped his finger between the disciple’s lips. “Try biting.”

Luo Binghe did. Shen Yuan shrieked.

“These are baby teeth?!”

The disciple was so confused, Shen Yuan ended up explaining how teeth.. are supposed to get replaced. And no, they were *not* taken out by force. Though sometimes a dentist’s help might be needed, most of the time it just fell out on its own. Luo Binghe asked what a dentist was, Shen Yuan just shrugged and told him it’s a person who examines the mouth.

The disciple then asked whether Shen Yuan was a dentist.

“No?” he answered, frowning not long after. “Why are you speaking like that?”

“Lhike whah?”

“That.”

A tiny nibble at his finger got him flushing red. Shen Yuan pulled out right away.

He cleared his throat, wiping his finger on the sheets before taking back his pen. “The movie,” he tried taking the conversation back on track. “Can we watch something else tomorrow?”

“I thought Shizun wanted to watch the series?” the disciple asked, already scribbling on his note.

Tomorrow’s to-do list :

1. Movie time with Shizun

“I did,” Shen Yuan admitted. "But I've watched the series too much, I don't think I want to watch it anymore." How could he watch more when it had bored him to death just before!

“Okay.” Luo Binghe nodded. He turned to look at his Shizun, hesitating for a while before he finally asked, “Can we eat cakes tomorrow?”

“We can.” Shen Yuan wrote down. By the time he turned his eyes back to the disciple, Luo Binghe was back chewing on his pen! Shen Yuan tapped the disciple’s head with his own pen. “Stop that!”

"I was thinking," the disciple mumbled, shyly avoiding his Shizun's gaze as he pulled the pen away from his mouth.

“What’s on your mind?” Shen Yuan asked, putting aside his pen before turning to lie down on his back. Luo Binghe followed.

“The underground pond,” Luo Binghe said, looking up at the white ceiling. “Were you washing your clothes there?”

“The swimming pool,” Shen Yuan corrected him. “And no, I wasn’t washing my clothes. Why?”

“You had..” the disciple gestured at his body, avoiding his gaze. “Very.. little..” he gave up explaining. “I thought you were washing your clothes.”

Before Shen Yuan could speak, Luo Binghe added, “You should’ve let me do the laundry.”

The disciple was frowning, not liking the idea of his Shizun working.

“I told you someone’s doing that for us already.” Shen Yuan reached to tuck the disciple's hair behind his ear. “But if you insist..”

“I insist.” Luo Binghe firmly nodded, making his Shizun scoff and turned to lie back down on his stomach.

Show binghe the washing machine, he wrote.

And when he turned his face to look at Luo Binghe, the disciple was beaming!

Shen Yuan knew right away that it was a battle he could never win.

Fine!! Do the laundry!! Do whatever!!

Shen Yuan also ended up breaking the keep-it-down-to-three rule.

He added one more entry to his to-do list, not even having to write it down. Clutching the thought close to his heart as he fell asleep that night;

Need to.. keep that smile. Keep.. keep.. keep…

It was not the movie.

It was *never* about the movie.

Shen Yuan realized that it was *not* the movie's fault when he felt Luo Binghe sneaking off their bed. Because he suddenly felt like chugging on a bottle of vinegar! Sour! And the television wasn't even on!

"No," he groaned, catching the disciple's wrist still with his eyes closed. He then pulled Luo Binghe to lie back down on the bed. Immediately getting on top of him and nuzzled against the disciple's neck as he repeated firmly, "No."

The disciple was turning stiff underneath him; the small part of his brain told him that he *might* regret this in the morning. But the sun wasn't even fully up yet! Shen Yuan didn't want the day to start yet! He missed his lazy mornings. Missed waking up to Luo Binghe in his arms.

"Don't cook breakfast," he mumbled, nuzzling some more. "I want to sleep." *with you,* he didn't say out loud. He was literally on top of him though, that must've been enough to convey the message.

"Shizun can sleep while this disciple-"

"No."

The disciple froze. It took a while for Shen Yuan to feel back the rise and fall of Luo Binghe's chest. Was the disciple holding his breath? Did he scare him? Shen Yuan sighed. "No," he said again, in a much softer voice this time. "Can you help me scratch my back?"

Luo Binghe obliged.

And it felt good! To have his back scratched!

There were so many places he couldn't reach on his own. Even when he could, the itch was far hidden under so many layers of clothes! All those years of being a peak lord.. fighting the urge to scratch..

“Lower,” Shen Yuan said. Then a few minutes after, “Up.”

“A little to the right.”

“No, stop. Right there.”

“Left..”

And so many *more* commands the disciple ended up asking, sounding actually concerned, “Would you like me to prepare you a bath instead?”

Shen Yuan shook his head. “Keep scratching,” he mumbled. Falling back asleep surrounded by the warmth he missed.

Chapter End Notes

so a little pillow talk.. a little peek of sleepy shizun.. and the baby sheep's hammering heart going dontpanicdontpanicdontpanic underneath him..

Chapter 11: once upon a time, there was a washing machine.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So apparently the disciple and the washing machine weren't meant to be friends.

Shen Yuan had just finished explaining how the machine works when his phone rang. “Put these in first,” he said, gesturing at the dirty clothes. Then he left the room.

He couldn't take his brother's call in front of Luo Binghe.

Because..

"Shushu!"

And there he went, cooing at his niece.

"Does Shushu want cookies?" The voice chirped. *"I'm making cookies!"*

Adorable! Shen Yuan couldn't handle!

"She's helping her mom bake," came his brother's voice, followed by a shout of protest from his niece. The phone got snatched, it seemed. *"The kitchen is a mess."*

"She's four. What do you expect?" Shen Yuan chuckled. "Let her explore."

"Yeah. But her cookie-loving baba is right here, ready to devour some cookies! And she asked for her shushu instead!"

His brother sure was talking to him, but the *give it baaaack* whine in the background told him that he just needed an excuse to sulk.

"See?! She only likes you!"

Shen Yuan was laughing when his niece got back on the phone, excitedly calling out for her uncle as her dad groaned.

It was a phase, Shen Yuan knew. He got two nieces and a nephew! A little sister too! He knew that kids grew up very soon.

His nephew used to call him for *emergency* math homeworks and cling to him all the time. Now he didn't even add emojis to his Shushu's birthday texts! No hugs even! As if *I'm no longer a child* was a valid excuse!

Shen Ziyi was like that too. Look at her now calling him stinky all the time! As if she never cried for not being able to cling!

He had learned to cherish these moments; he knew they'd grow up and wouldn't be needing him as much. That explained why he had been spoiling this niece of his rotten! No wonder she wanted to give him cookies.

"Shushu?" She called, voice a bit hesitant. Shen Yuan realized then that he hadn't been answering.

"I'm here," he said. Oh, how he missed this.

"I said I send cookies."

"You'll send cookies?"

"After I bake! Many cookies! For Shushu!"

He could hear his brother complaining, but Shen Yuan could only laugh. He promised he'd eat and send pictures later.

The phone call ended with his niece saying goodbye and his brother whining for cookies.

Shen Yuan was humming to a random donghua opening song as he walked back to the laundry room. Eyes glued to his phone screen, only looking up when he heard a choked out sob.

His phone almost fell at the sight.

Another opening song—one that was definitely *not* from any donghua, was playing in his head.

“Shizun, help..” the disciple sniffled. “I’m stuck..”

No way.

This was a bad prank. Nobody could actually get stuck in the washing machine. Not like that. Not like *this.* No.

But then Luo Binghe was calling for him again, struggling to get his upper body out.

Did he actually get stuck..?

What kind of scenario was this, really.

And to think that he woke up this morning to something he had mistaken as a sword hilt..

The world was definitely messing with him.

Luo Binghe whimpered. Shen Yuan cursed under his breath.

“I’m here,” he said as he approached the disciple. He put his hand on the disciple’s lower back, letting him feel his presence. “How did you even get stuck, you silly. I wasn’t even gone for long!”

“I was just.. looking.. and..” Luo Binghe sobbed even harder. “I couldn’t get out..”

Shen Yuan didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Though he knew he had no time for any of that when the disciple said, “I’ve been calling for Shizun, but.. You.. I thought.. I thought..”

“I’m here.” Shen Yuan caressed his back. “I’m here. Can you relax a bit for me?”

The disciple tensed up even more. Look at those broad shoulders! No wonder he couldn’t get out. How did he get in even! Shen Yuan wanted to scream.

“I’m here,” he said again, this time leaning a bit toward the disciple. “Imagine me holding you. How do you shrink? How do you fit yourself in my arms?”

Luo Binghe stopped fighting the machine. He stopped wriggling to get free and just.. shrinked. Could humans even shrink? Shen Yuan had no idea. He found no better words to explain though. But the disciple *did* shrink! Pliant as his Shizun gently pulled him out of the machine.

And he melted right into his arms. Sobbing.

With the disciple on his lap, Shen Yuan could finally laugh.

The absurdity of all.. these. Luo Binghe looked so pitiful, he didn’t even have the heart to scold!

“What do you think you’re doing?” he ended up asking, huddling the disciple closer. “I said put the clothes in, not yourself. The machine can’t wash you!”

The answer came in a small voice, “I was curious who’s working inside..”

“Nobody’s working inside.” Shen Yuan sighed. Seeing how the disciple’s hair was damp with sweat, he sighed even more. “What do I do with you..”

“I’m so-”

“Shush.” Shen Yuan shook the disciple in his arms.

“The machine can’t wash you,” he said, pulling away a bit to look at Luo Binghe’s face. “But I can. Would you like me to help wash your hair?”

The tears dried in an instant.

Gone.

Just like how Shen Yuan wanted to be now: gone.

Why did he keep doing things on impulse!! As if the heavenly pillar encounter this morning wasn’t enough!!

“I wash,” Luo Binghe immediately said, getting up from his Shizun's lap to take the basket of dirty clothes. Holding it close to his chest. “I wash this. Shizun can wash my hair.”

Shen Yuan was out of words. Luo Binghe didn’t even look at him as he marched out of the room! With the laundry basket!

“Where are you going!”

“Bedroom.”

Shen Yuan got up from the floor. He chased the disciple then, pulling the hood of his jacket to stop him. “Where are you going to wash the clothes!”

“Bathtub,” the disciple answered. Firm. The hold from his Shizun did nothing to stop him.

“Where am *I* going to wash your hair?!”

And Luo Binghe answered, “Bathtub.”

--

It wasn't as bad as Shen Yuan thought.

They were both fully clothed, with the disciple only taking his jacket off. And he just started.. washing clothes. In the bathtub. With body soap.

Shen Yuan just let him.

Then he rolled up his sleeves and started washing the disciple's hair. Not even getting in the tub, just sitting down on the edge. Pulling on the disciple's hair to get his head under the faucet to wet his hair.

Luo Binghe kept his eyes wide open and Shen Yuan scolded him for that.

"You're supposed to close your eyes," he grunted as he turned off the faucet. He poured shampoo over the disciple's head and gave him a massage. "What if it gets into your eyes?"

The disciple did as he was told, relaxing at his Shizun's touch. The laundry all forgotten.

"Your nails," Shen Yuan started. "You didn't ask A-Yi to have them retouched?"

The disciple hummed, leaning closer to his Shizun as he answered, "She offered. I refused."

Seeing the soft smile on the disciple's face, Shen Yuan stopped himself from asking.

"There were times I had to rely on dreams to remember," Luo Binghe said. "To not forget."

"But I couldn't see with my eyes open. I just thought.. it would've been great to have these painted on my nails. As a reminder of what I'm working for. Of what I need to protect."

The fading bamboo on his nails...

"Qing Jing Peak?" Shen Yuan ended up asking, hesitant.

Luo Binghe took a peek at his Shizun—who by now looked lost. Gaze unfocused. The disciple closed his eyes back before his Shizun could find him looking.

"Sure," Luo Binghe mumbled, nudging his head against his Shizun's hands. They stopped moving! He then continued, "Qing Jing. More specifically, its pea-"

"Scoot over," Shen Yuan cut him off, followed by a hard tug on his hair.

Luo Binghe obliged. Though he froze when he felt his Shizun getting into the tub with him; taking a seat right behind him. Legs caging him in place.

The hands started to move once more, massaging his scalp. Luo Binghe slowly relaxed.

Shen Yuan was lost in his own conflicted thoughts.

If Luo Binghe no longer needed to remind himself of something he'd been trying so hard to not forget, would that mean.. he found his own way back?

Shen Yuan didn't know the disciple had loved the peak that much. But looking at that smile before.. he had no doubts. *This* Luo Binghe was fond of his sect.

There was no Cang Qiong in this world. No peaks. No Qing Jing. Would he really… leave?

Shen Yuan didn't like the thought. But he also didn't like the idea of holding him back from what he wanted to achieve.

His hands slowly stopped. Sliding down the disciple's body before finding their way around his waist. Unconsciously pulling him closer as he asked, "Can you stay a little longer?"

Luo Binghe took it as more time in the bathtub! With his Shizun! So of course he'd say, "Yes."

Chapter End Notes

this chapter's genre is angst but only for shen yuan bc he's dumb

Chapter 12: Act II: Teething.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luo Binghe was humming. Again.

Ever since that day of the washing machine incident, the disciple had been very… Shen Yuan wasn't sure what to call it. Giddy? Happy? Like being trusted with the laundry was a dream come true.

Shen Yuan could only sigh at the wet clothes hanging on his balcony; boxers displayed for all the world to see. But he couldn't complain, really. Not when Luo Binghe was hanging it for him oh-so-happily.

"So whose smile is it?" he asked, leaning against the laundry-free space on the railing. "Whose smile is as sweet as honey?"

The humming stopped.

"Shizun knows the song?" Luo Binghe asked, looking shy like he just got caught.

Shen Yuan chuckled. Instead of answering, he asked, "Granny taught you?"

"I heard her singing when we were cooking," said Luo Binghe, hanging the last piece of clothes before turning to look at his Shizun. "I liked the lyrics."

"You hang out with her too much." Shen Yuan reached to pinch the disciple's reddening cheek. "With A-Yi too."

Not that he was jealous or anything.

The meals were great! The way Luo Binghe hummed was pretty cute too. Kudos to Granny for the influence.

Shen Ziyi though..

Shen Yuan remembered choking on his cake when Luo Binghe suddenly asked whether he was a gong or a shou. Or that time when he asked whether he could borrow his phone to read —which Shen Yuan gladly gave, only to gape at his browser history once the phone was returned. Or that time when..

Anyways.

Luo Binghe had spent even *more* time with Granny and Shen Ziyi these days, Shen Yuan couldn't even ask him to go out! He wanted to show him around, wanted to let him see what *this* world could offer. He'd been meaning to ask for quite a while now, but the disciple was

too busy! He even started befriending nearly *everyone* he could find in the house too! This little social butterfly..

It was nice though. More friends meant more reasons for him to stay, right? And whoever this.. person with the sweet smile Luo Binghe was humming so happily about, Shen Yuan hoped that the person was from this world.

Maybe one of Shen Ziyi's friends..? Luo Binghe gave them his favorite snacks when they came over a few days ago..

Was it that girl with the red shirt..?

Well.

At least she's from this world..

"Shizun?" Luo Binghe called, breaking his train of thoughts.

"Mm?"

Luo Binghe seemed to hesitate for a while before asking, "Does Shizun.. not like it when I spend time with Granny and A-Yi?"

Shen Yuan frowned. "I didn't say that?"

"But you sighed," Luo Binghe said, sighing loudly to demonstrate. "And your shoulders slumped." This one was dramatically demonstrated too.

"I don't." Shen Yuan straightened up. It was only then that he realized his shoulders *did* slump. But did he sigh that loud? Obviously not!

...right?

"I don't," he said again, clearing his throat as he walked back into his room. "You're free to spend time with anyone of your choice."

That earned him a clinging disciple on his back.

"Can I spend time with Shizun then?"

"I'm busy," Shen Yuan said, just to keep the very little dignity he had.

"I'll let you bite my cheeks," Luo Binghe offered, letting himself get dragged along.

Shen Yuan groaned as he plopped down face first on the bed, hand reaching to tap the sticky disciple on top of him. Stating, "You always let me bite your cheeks."

Luo Binghe rolled over. "I do."

Upon hearing his answer, Shen Yuan scoffed. "Then what's so special about it?"

Shen Yuan fixed his position to lie on his side, propping himself up on one elbow. He watched as the disciple took his time to think. Then, very hesitantly, came the answer: “My cheeks?”

And how was he supposed to say no to that! Shen Yuan dived in and aimed straight for the cheek! And nommed!

Luo Binghe shrieked! But he made no effort to pull away, letting his Shizun suck on his cheek like a leech.

He thought that he might, at some point, have passed the qualification of having nommable cheeks. He couldn't really tell the difference when he looked at himself in the mirror though..

Or maybe it wasn't him that changed?

"Is Shizun teething?"

Shen Yuan choked. On.. air? Luo Binghe wasn't sure. It was not like he could really *eat* his cheeks! But anyway. He choked. And it felt wet on his cheek.

At the lack of response and *more* bitings, he concluded that his guess was right. Assuming that his Shizun was shy for still having his tooth growing—yes, he had *learned* more about teeth, he chose not to say anything.

Though when he shared his concern with Shen Ziyi later that day, all he got was a smack on the head.

And a screech, "I don't need to know that!"

So maybe teething was a personal thing after all..

He didn't know what it felt like to be having itchy gums, but looking at how often Shen Yuan had been nomming on his cheeks...

Could his Shizun have been having a hard time when he was away?! Would that explain the sigh and the unusual body slump?! His Shizun had the best posture, the best manner! For him to slump like that..

All the pain he had been through.. fighting itchy gums...

Unacceptable!

No! Luo Binghe wouldn't let him suffer alone!

So for the first time in a very long while, he didn't join Granny in the kitchen. He went to tell her though. This time leaving the teething part out and just told her that he had.. something else to do with gege. A very urgent one! Granny just laughed and shooed him away.

He thanked Granny and dashed for his room. He knew it was all worth it when he heard the little gasp his Shizun let out as he pounced on him, demanding for him to use his cheeks.

Shen Yuan looked confused. But he gave in anyway.

And later when they were all settled for bed, scribbling down their list, Shen Yuan braced himself to ask, "Are you busy tomorrow?"

The answer was immediate: "No."

"You're not going to learn new recipes from Granny?"

"No."

"No reading session with A-Yi?"

"No."

"No flowers to plant?"

"No."

"No stray cats to feed?"

"No."

And *more* questions.

Shen Yuan ended up asking all those things Luo Binghe had in his to-do list from the previous days. Almost gaping at all the *no* he received.

"No laundry?" Shen Yuan asked. The very last one, he swore.

The slight hesitation was clear on the disciple's face, but he shook his head anyway. Voice firm as he said, "No." Then he pushed his book closer to his Shizun, scooting himself closer as well—close enough for his Shizun to read as he wrote down his tomorrow's to-do list.

Tomorrow's to-do list :

1-3. Stay by Shizun's side.

Shen Yuan took his time reading. Eyes lingering on the disciple's handwriting even long after he had finished writing.

His voice was small when he asked, "Can we go out tomorrow?"

Luo Binghe waited until his Shizun looked up at him to answer. And when he did, he held his gaze. Saying, "Yes."

And if he noticed the way his Shizun's eyes gleamed, he chose not to say a thing.

Chapter End Notes

Look. I can ex--((slowly fades into the background)))------plain……

....no actually i can't. let them be dumb and figure things out themselves🔎

Chapter 13: shoooooopping time!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Everything was great.

Well, except for the fact that people don't kiss *this* much in public—at least that was what Shen Yuan believed, everything was great!

The ride to the mall was fun. It was Luo Binghe's first time being in a car, and Shen Yuan had managed to convince him that it was okay to roll down the window, that it was okay for him to take a look as long as he was careful. And Luo Binghe gladly did! Very adorably so! Clutching on the window frame, throwing the *Shizun, what is that?* questions at every foreign object he could see.

Shopping was fun too! Shen Yuan literally bought everything Luo Binghe touched. The only problem was that Luo Binghe didn't touch a lot of things, and Shen Yuan just started offering whenever he found the disciple's eyes lingered for too long on something.

And each time Luo Binghe leaned in to offer his cheek, Shen Yuan could only sigh. He kissed him anyway.

Let all those stares thrown at them be damned!

Being in a place full of people like this must've been a little overwhelming for the disciple! Shen Yuan was pretty much convinced that the disciple needed it; the kisses. The familiarity.

Though as the time passed, Luo Binghe had stopped more often just to claim his kisses. And being the considerate Shizun that he was, of course Shen Yuan gave them.

"Again?" he asked, sighing as he pecked the disciple's cheek for the.. how many times that day? Shen Yuan lost count. At the frown he received as he pulled away, he sighed once more. Pulling the disciple closer to him as he planted another kiss on the disciple's cheek. Staying a bit longer this time.

The disciple was *very* red when he pulled away. He was still frowning though! But no. Enough kisses. Enough kisses at *this* store. Have some mercy on people at least!

"Sorry," Shen Yuan mumbled at the gawking shop assistant. She had been doing a very great job in assisting them! Shen Yuan wouldn't want to traumatize her with too much PDA! "We'll take these. And that one too, please. In his size."

She seemed to be in a daze as she asked, "...All...of this?"

Shen Yuan decided that he might actually need to tell Luo Binghe kisses weren't meant to be thrown so freely like this in public. Look at that poor girl! Blushing and apologizing once she realized she had been staring.

He dismissed her with a smile as he guided Luo Binghe to the cashier, palm rested on the disciple's lower back to assure him that he would still be there even without having his lips pressed against his cheeks. That he wouldn't go anywhere, not without him.

--

"You think I'm teething," Shen Yuan deadpanned.

Luo Binghe was chewing on his food, swallowing as he nodded.

He was so concerned for his Shizun's itchy gums that he ended up sharing his worries when they settled down for lunch, stumbling upon his words as he spoke. What did he have to do to soothe the itch?! Why did Shizun refuse to bite his cheeks all day?! Were his cheeks not good enough?! He was *so* worried he almost cried!

But then it turned out his Shizun wasn't teething after all! He could finally feel at ease!

"So you've been trying to get me to bite your cheeks."

Luo Binghe nodded once more.

"And you told A-Yi that *I* was teething," said Shen Yuan. "That I kept biting you."

More nods. "And then she smacked me!"

"And then she smacked you," his Shizun repeated. Seeming not amused at all as he spoke, "You deserve that."

Luo Binghe didn't pay that any mind. Instead he asked, "Why are you not putting cucumber in mine?" Eyes growing wide in realization as Shen Yuan was making his own wrap.

One wrap for him, one wrap for his Shizun. It had been like that since Shen Yuan shoved food into his mouth when he was about to cry. All Luo Binghe had to do was to open his mouth! What a good way to have lunch!

Shen Yuan cringed as he took a new wrapper, put only a slice of cucumber on it, then went to feed him.

"The duck!" Luo Binghe whined, which only earned him the lone cucumber wrap shoved into his mouth. Cucumber only! Not even a drip of sauce! He took it anyway. Still managing to pout even as he chewed. "You didn't put the meat.."

"Don't you have two functioning hands?"

"They're all sore from carrying the bags."

At the look he received, Luo Binghe could feel his ears getting warm. Seemed like he got caught lying! And so he held both his hands up in surrender. Saying, "I spent all my energy worrying!"

At least this one wasn't entirely a lie!

And so lunch went on just like that, with Shen Yuan feeding the spoiled disciple.

Though later when he insisted that he'd carry the shopping bags, Luo Binghe panicked and told him that his hands were all healed! Shen Yuan only scoffed and took all the bags from the sulking disciple. It only took a cone of ice cream to cheer him up, he got all bubbly after his daily dose of sweet.

Then they went shopping again, this time for cookware.

Shen Yuan had no idea on what to get, so he just nodded to whatever Luo Binghe was pointing at.

All those *Gege, what is that?* were replied by an immediate *let's get that.*

The disciple was surely confused. He took yet another item into their cart, asking, "But what is this for?"

At the lack of response, he frowned. Then realizing that his Shizun was just as clueless as he was, he frowned even more! "We don't need these," he ended up saying, putting all the unknown items back to where they were supposed to be. Mumbling, "Why are you wasting money on things you don't know.."

It was a good thing they came here after Luo Binghe knew his Shizun wasn't teething. He could think properly with no worries now!

"You enjoy cooking," said Shen Yuan.

That seemed to stop the disciple.

"I think we can use this one to make ice cubes." Shen Yuan lightly tugged on the disciple's arm, guiding his hand to put the item he was holding back into the cart. "Bunny-shaped ice cubes?"

Luo Binghe hesitated. "More like jelly," he said, voice sounding small as he spoke. "I think I've seen a video.."

"Yeah. Bunny jellies!" Shen Yuan chuckled as the disciple finally gave in. "Should we get other shapes too?"

They ended up getting some more silicone molds. Then as they walked some more, Luo Binghe had started to point at the things he could name. Saying, "I know that."

And Shen Yuan's chest would just swell with pride each time! That glint in the disciple's eyes as he explained what he knew was so precious he ended up taking the matter into his own hands; taking the mentioned items into their cart.

"But we have these alre-"

“These are yours,” said Shen Yuan before the disciple could finish talking. “You can still use the one in the kitchen, but I’d like you to have your own equipment too.”

“Swordsmen fight better with their own swords,” he continued, tilting his head a bit as he looked at Luo Binghe. “Wouldn’t it be the same with cooking?” Adding not long after, “Baking?”

The disciple just stood there. Staring at him. Feeling shy with what he just said, Shen Yuan cleared his throat and pushed the cart. Walking first. What was he even saying! Shen Yuan, that was some cringe ass shit! You du- *oh.*

He could feel something bumping against his back, clutching on the fabric of his shirt. Then came the voice. Barely a whisper; “I like cooking..”

“Yeah,” Shen Yuan croaked out, trying to sound normal as he took the nearest thing he could reach. Reading the description on the package as he offered, “Fruit peeler?”

The disciple peeked from behind his shoulder, and Shen Yuan turned his head a bit to meet his gaze. They looked at each other for quite a while like that. Luo Binghe’s eyes were glistening with tears when he spoke, “I can peel with knives..”

A soft smile made its way to Shen Yuan’s face as he asked, “Knife set then?”

The disciple seemed to hesitate. But when he finally nodded, his Shizun’s smile got even wider!

“Then this one’s for me,” said Shen Yuan, about to put the peeler into their cart when his wrist got caught. He groaned. Voice teasing as he asked, “I can't waste my own money?”

"No need," Luo Binghe said. Shen Yuan could see the tip of the disciple’s ears getting red as he took the peelers from his hand, putting it back to the shelves. Though his face was filled with renewed determination as he spoke, “I’ll peel them for you.”

“With the knife set?” Shen Yuan asked.

“With the knife set,” Luo Binghe answered, this time no longer hesitating.

And it was! Really! Cute! When he chose his own knives!

Luo Binghe looked so happy, people who saw his smile ended up getting the exact same set he just took!

He didn’t even notice that he had gathered his own followers as he wandered around, taking more items to fill the cart. Shen Yuan could only shake his head as he noticed *more* people following their steps. But he couldn’t really blame them, really. Not when Luo Binghe was smiling like *that.*

“Do you think I need that?” the disciple asked, eyes glued on one particular apron.

Shen Yuan followed his gaze, cringing slightly at the design of one.. lone.. cucumber. Peeking out from the chest pocket of the apron.. With a pair of sunglasses on.. Kind of a questionable design on an apron, but one thing more concerning was that: what's with Luo Binghe's sudden interest in cucumbers!! It almost felt like a personal attack!

Though Shen Yuan couldn't really lie when he said, "It's cute."

"Yeah." Luo Binghe agreed. Then he turned to look at his Shizun. Asking, "But do you think I need that?"

"It's cute," Shen Yuan said once more. A little side glance he took earned him eager nods from the disciple's new fans.

"I need that?" the disciple asked.

Shen Yuan looked at the apron once more before turning his gaze back to the disciple, sighing in defeat. "You do."

Luo Binghe seemed to be unsure of what the sigh could mean. But his Shizun said he needed the apron! He hesitated. Then, "Can we.."

And before he could even finish his sentence, Shen Yuan's laughter made him stop thinking altogether. He could *not* think! Not when his Shizun was laughing like this.

Shen Yuan reached out to pat the disciple's head, smiling at the way Luo Binghe leaned into his touch. An immediate reaction.

Then as he took the apron into their cart, he confirmed, "We can."

Chapter End Notes

Guess who sprint-wrote after waking up to sv book announcement🥺 tiny🥺 baby🥺 bunhe🥺 i wanna nom at those curls tiny tiny tiny tiny happy baby tiny baby🥺 today is a gOOOOD DAY so here i offer you early updates🥺

(+++++) DONGHUA SEASON 2 CAN YOU EVEN HEAR MY TEARS

Chapter 14: can I stay?

Chapter Summary

binghe had some bad thoughts..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"This is not the way back."

Luo Binghe knew. He got the roads memorized. The sky was getting dark and he knew they were *not* going back.

Shen Yuan hummed, fingers lightly tapping on the steering wheel. “Mm, we’re going somewhere else.”

Luo Binghe didn’t like that. Not at all.

“...this is not the way back,” his words came with a choked sob, surprising even himself. “Not.. we’re not…”

“Hey.” Shen Yuan reached for his hand, taking a glance at the disciple before focusing back on the road. “What’s wrong?”

It was an ugly, ugly feeling. He knew that things were too good to be real; that one day he’d wake up and find himself alone all over again. That the happiness he felt was just a faraway dream—one that was slowly slipping away from his fingers no matter how strong he tried to grip.

Luo Binghe was not ready.

Despite knowing, he had not braced himself for this. Luo Binghe was not ready for the sudden dread crashing over him. His Shizun could leave him just anywhere and Luo Binghe wouldn’t even find his way back to him. How could he, with all his powers stripped?

All those hardships that he had endured *to protect..* to gain power.. yet there was no trace of it left. How could he protect his Shizun in this state? He was nothing but a useless, broken thing.

Of course just helping with the house chores wouldn’t suffice. Of course his Shizun wouldn’t want to keep a broken disciple. Of course..

It was so foolish of him to indulge himself in—

“Binghe.”

The harsh tone brought him back to reality. Seemed like it was not Shen Yuan’s first try calling out for the disciple, looking at the concerned gaze thrown upon Luo Binghe as he finally turned to look at him.

“Oh, God. Why are you.. Why- hey.” He tore his gaze away, looking at the road as he brought the disciple’s hand to his lap and squeezed before letting go. At the soft whimper he heard, Shen Yuan cursed. “Fuck. Sorry, I. Hold up. It’s been so long, I can’t drive with one hand! Do I pull over? I should pull over. Fuck. Are you okay? Why are you crying..”

Luo Binghe wanted to stop. He didn’t want to be any more of a burden, but he *couldn’t.* The tears just wouldn’t stop. They were getting even further away and Luo Binghe hated that he couldn’t memorize this foreign road, vision blurry with tears. “Not the way back.. Not going back..”

The disciple sounded so sad, Shen Yuan ended up reaching back for his hand. He didn’t pull over. Instead he asked, “You wanna go home?”

He had a home?

Luo Binghe didn’t know how to answer.

“Let’s have dinner at home,” his Shizun answered for him. “Granny must’ve been cooking by now. Or we can order something. Anything you’d like to eat?”

Luo Binghe opened his mouth to speak, though no words came out as he clutched on the fabric of his Shizun’s pants. Shen Yuan let him. Thumb gently brushing over the disciple’s knuckles as he offered, “We can cook?” Then he cleared his throat. Adding, “I mean. I can’t. But you can cook, if you want. Test out the new knives, see whether they’re as good as people claimed?”

The words seemed to soothe Luo Binghe, so Shen Yuan just kept talking. Mentioning every product they bought as he drove.

Luo Binghe kept glancing at the window and his Shizun, grip slowly loosening as the streets had gotten more familiar. Shen Yuan didn’t let go, thumb still gently caressing the back of his hand. “I can tie the apron for you,” he said.

And Luo Binghe whined. Though when Shen Yuan glanced at him, the disciple had stopped crying. Ears turning red from.. embarrassment?

“You’d like that?” Shen Yuan asked. “You want me to tie your apron for you?”

Luo Binghe’s fingers twitched. His voice was small when he finally spoke, “If that’s okay with Shizun..”

Luo Binghe had been calling him gege throughout the day, Shen Yuan chuckled at the sudden change. “Of course it’s okay with me,” he said, squeezing the disciple’s hand.

The car was engulfed in silence for quite a while before Shen Yuan asked, “What’s on your mind?”

“Fried rice,” the disciple mumbled, leaning back on his seat. “With prawns. We still have some in the fridge..”

“We have prawns?”

“Mm.” Luo Binghe nodded. Then he started recalling other things they had in the fridge and his cooking plan for the rest of the week, growing more relaxed at every acknowledging hum his Shizun gave him.

Shen Yuan didn’t stop him. He didn’t oppose the idea of him cooking. Maybe Luo Binghe could.. stay for another week. Maybe if he continued to do well, he could.. *Oh.* Wait. He missed something.

Luo Binghe stopped talking. Hesitating for a while before asking, “...we’re going home?”

“We are,” Shen Yuan answered without a pause.

Not quite believing his ears, Luo Binghe asked once more, “Home?”

Shen Yuan frowned. Wasn’t he the one crying, wanting to go back?! Did he not want to go home after all? Did Shen Yuan understand it wrong?!

“I thought you wanted to-” he stopped. The disciple’s eyes were wide when Shen Yuan turned to look at him, still gleaming with tears.

“Yes,” Shen Yuan ended up saying. “We’re going home.”

Luo Binghe let out a shuddering breath. Voice barely a whisper as he spoke, “We’re going home..”

“Home,” his Shizun confirmed.

The word lit up something in him. So he kept chanting that in his head; *home, home, home, home.* And exclaimed, “We’re going home!”

And when they did get home, he announced to almost everyone: “I’m home!”

He knocked fervently on Shen Ziyi’s door only to tackle the poor girl into a hug and declared, “I’m home!”

Then he ran off downstairs. Leaving a confused Shen Ziyi who could only blink at her brother. Asking, “Is he high?”

Shen Yuan had only shrugged before following the disciple. Seemed like he was too late to save Granny though! The old woman was already in Luo Binghe’s embrace when he got to the kitchen. She seemed amused rather than confused, patting the disciple’s back as she welcomed him home.

Shen Yuan kept his promise; tying the disciple's apron for him. He didn't even leave the kitchen when he started cooking.

And once they were finally settled for the night, lying on the bed with their books opened, Luo Binghe asked, "Can we go out again tomorrow?"

Shen Yuan set his pen down. He had finished writing his own list, with the *1-3. Anything Binghe wants to do* on his tomorrow's to-do list. "Go out where?" he asked, rolling over to lie on his back. "The mall again?"

"Anywhere," the disciple said, tapping his pen impatiently against the paper. "Can we go out again?"

"We can," Shen Yuan said, scooting closer to take a look at the disciple's list. "Binghe, I can see your tail wagging."

Luo Binghe had learned that his Shizun didn't actually mean a real tail! He had heard those words quite a lot these days. It meant he looked excited! And this time, he! Really! Was! Excited! He was grinning so wide as he scribbled down, *2. Go out with Shizun.*

"Do you like going out that much?" Shen Yuan asked.

"No," the disciple answered.

3. Go home!

"I like going home."

Then he threw his pen away. Got himself into a crawling position. And wiggled his butt.

Shen Yuan was so taken aback at the sight he shrieked, "What are you doing!"

He pulled the disciple into his arms, who was by now giggling as he climbed up his Shizun's body. Settling himself down with his face buried on the crook of Shen Yuan's neck.

"Wagging my tail," Luo Binghe said. Shen Yuan had to hold his waist to stop the disciple from doing more of the.. the.. scandalous thing!

"You don't have a tail," Shen Yuan reminded him. Groaning as he held him closer. "Stop that!"

Luo Binghe halted. "But Shizun said.. Wagging tail means excited.. Happy.."

"Yes.." *if you're a dog,* he didn't say out loud.

"I can't wag my tail…?"

The implication behind those words felt heavy on his chest.

He loosened his hold on the disciple, exhaling softly as he patted his lower back. Encouraging him, “You can.”

And Luo Binghe did.

It was.. quite a strange sight. Shen Yuan regretted pulling the disciple into his arms because he just kind of started to.. wiggle his butt. Above him. And Shen Yuan couldn’t even push him away because he didn’t want him to get the wrong idea.

Maybe he should choose his words properly next time.

And what was with this unusual amount of energy! Bedtime Binghe meant sleepy Binghe! Since when did he become *this* active?!

Maybe he should ask him to count sheep, like those earlier days? Yeah.

But not now. For now he would just.. let him do.. his thing.

Luo Binghe settled himself back on top of his Shizun once he was done. Snuggling closer as he whispered, “I’m home.”

Shen Yuan, still quite shocked, only nodded. His arms seemed to move on their own though; embracing Luo Binghe before his mind could process. It almost felt like the right thing to do. Holding him like this.

“I’m home,” Luo Binghe said once more.

Again, Shen Yuan nodded. This time placing a kiss on the disciple’s head. “You’re home.”

“Can I stay?” Luo Binghe asked.

“You can,” Shen Yuan answered.

Luo Binghe shifted a bit, looking up to search for his Shizun’s eyes. Holding his gaze for a while before finally saying, “Shizun can’t take his words back.” Then he tucked his head back under his Shizun’s chin. Nuzzling.

“Why would I?” Of course Shen Yuan wouldn’t take his words back! Luo Binghe had *willingly* offered himself to stay! That meant he wouldn't have to worry about him leaving anymore. He wouldn’t go back to that world. He’d stay.

Though when he nudged the disciple to move, Luo Binghe didn’t budge. Then it dawned upon him..

“Oh. You mean *on* me?”

The disciple’s exaggerated snore was a clear answer.

Chapter End Notes

getting closer to the end!!<3

Chapter 15: everyone knows?!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Your boyfriend went viral.”

Shen Yuan looked up to find Shen Ziyi barging into his room. "What boyfriend?" He asked, setting away his book along with his reading glasses.

His sister looked at him with a face that seemed to say, *are you for real?!*

Shen Yuan only blinked.

“I’m quite surprised that *you* didn’t know.” Shen Ziyi sighed as she took out her phone. Fiddling with it as she walked toward the bed, taking a seat on the edge. “It’s all over the internet.”

Shen Yuan crawled up to her, peeking at the screen from behind her shoulder. “I don’t have my phone with me,” he said. “I also don’t have a boyfriend.”

Shen Ziyi had to stop scrolling to smack the side of her brother’s head.

Though when Shen Yuan was about to protest, she shoved her phone right in front of his face. “Look for yourself,” she said, letting go of her phone once her brother took it. “What’s wrong with your boyfriend’s phone anyway? He keeps using yours.”

“He doesn’t have one,” Shen Yuan said almost immediately, moving to sit next to his sister.

Luo Binghe had been using his phone to learn new recipes lately. Or to read. He still couldn't type with the pinyin keyboard though, and Shen Yuan did *not* offer himself to teach the disciple. Luo Binghe using the voice input was too cute! He spoke very politely to the phone!

But anyway. He'd been using his phone! That disciple! He kept refusing too whenever Shen Yuan offered him a new one.

“Right. And you said you don’t have a boyfriend,” Shen Ziyi snorted.

Shen Yuan was too focused to notice, eyes glued to the phone screen.

I met the knife fairy!! So remember this one post that blew up a few days ago, saying that there was someone with a smile soooo bright it hypnotizes you to buy expensive knives even when you don’t cook? I didn’t believe it at first because the photo attached was blurry, and I thought it was just the Z brand’s marketing strategy. But guess what?! I met him!! And I think he’s an idol!! Or dancer? I don’t know but I saw him dancing at the arcade today and oh wow it was so so so good, he gathered his own audience!! His manager gege looks so proud!

Shen Yuan scrolled down right away before he even finished reading the whole thing.

And the photo attached was of Luo Binghe smiling!

Not at the camera, obviously. He was smiling at *him.* Even just by looking at the picture, Shen Yuan could almost hear the disciple's voice asking: *Gege! One more song?!*

Despite being excited about going out, any place further than the mall was a big no to Luo Binghe. The nearby park and the mall were the only places Shen Yuan could take the disciple without him crying! Good thing the mall got a pretty big arcade they could play in. But who knew that the disciple would be exceptionally good at dancing?!

"People thought he's an actor." Shen Ziyi took her phone. And once it was handed back to her brother, the screen showed another post. "Look."

It was, apparently, the post that started the whole *knife fairy* thing.

--- he had his fans following him around. And the things he touched, people buy! I was so mesmerized I couldn't take a better picture but please I want to see more of that smile. With a face and hair and body like that, I'm pretty sure he's an actor. He looks like he just walked out of a xianxia movie!!---

And at the end, it was a call for help: *please help me find his name! I think I've become a fan!*

There were three pictures attached to the post. One of the crowd and two *very* blurry pictures of Luo Binghe.

He went viral.. over this?! Impressive. Seemed like the protagonist magnet still lingered after all!

"Anyways." Shen Ziyi locked her phone, putting it away as she asked, "You remember that picture you sent to Yanyan? The one with cookies?"

The cookies that were specially made by his niece for her Shushu? Of course he remembered. Besides, Luo Binghe had been the one taking the picture for him. More reasons to remember!

Shen Yuan opened his mouth to speak, but then he realized he'd been gaping at the screen! He cleared his throat. Sitting up straight on the bed as he asked, "What about it?"

"Zhengfei ge asked me whether you're dating someone," Shen Ziyi said, suddenly mentioning their older brother. "He said you look different."

And before he could utter any words, Shen Ziyi continued, "You *do* look different."

"Oh, really?" Shen Yuan asked, confused on what it had to do with the disciple being an internet sensation. "How do I look?" *Like a manager???,* he refrained himself from asking.

Shen Ziyi looked at him. Contemplating for a while before finally saying, "Happy." And added, "So I told him about Bing ge. And he asked for pictures. And.."

"He paid you to take pictures?" He guessed, earning himself a glare from his sister.

"That's not the issue right now." She sighed, not denying anyway. "So. Granny told me Bing ge had been hanging clothes on the balcony these days. I went to check. Do you even know we can see your wet underwear dangling from all the way down there?"

Now it was Shen Yuan's turn to sigh. "He doesn't trust the washing machine."

"So instead of just pictures, I took a video. You know, of Bing ge. I was like, hey! and he was just. Smiling! So happily! While waving his hands! Then I asked what's wrong with the washing machine. And his expression turned dark so suddenly, almost like he could kill! And you know what he said?" Shen Ziyi straightened up, trying to copy Luo Binghe from that time. Saying in a grim voice, *"It tried to swallow me."*

The disciple and his personal hatred for the washing machine.. Shen Yuan didn't know it had gotten *that* deep. But it didn't really surprise him. He asked instead, "Can I see?"

Shen Ziyi seemed to contemplate for a while before finally unlocking her phone once more. Shen Yuan frowned when he noticed his sister didn't exit the app and went to her profile instead!

And the video was *there.* In her profile.

Captioned, *knife fairy? Haha.*

Shen Yuan was about to scold! But Shen Ziyi was smart. She played the video.

And Shen Yuan could see Luo Binghe! Hanging clothes on the balcony, peering down when Shen Ziyi called for him! The beam on his face! The way he excitedly waved at her! Then the shift of expression at the mention of washing machine.

"People kept reposting," Shen Ziyi said once the video stopped playing. She scrolled down the comments section. "Then I got so many messages! So many offers. The Z brand is definitely itching for him. Since, you know. It was their knives that started this all anyway. But there are even a few huge electronic brands!"

Shen Yuan snatched her phone to read the comments.

"And oh. Did I mention the shampoo brands? They all want *him!"* She pointed at a comment from official account. Then another. And more as Shen Yuan kept scrolling. "Look at all these love calls!"

And there were indeed.. so many love calls. Shen Yuan didn't think he had seen *this* many official accounts gathered in one post!

"So.. you see. I didn't call for his name in the video," said Shen Ziyi, taking her phone back to replay the video. "See? I only screamed hey. But.."

"But?"

"Someone's been.. spamming." She put her phone down, expression turning serious as she looked at her brother. "Asking for Luo Binghe. But I didn't even know his full name that

time! So I asked Bing ge. He said yes, that's his name. Then I asked whether he knew who this person was, but he said he had no idea. That you're the only person who knows him in this world. Which is kinda weird, but anyway." She took a deep breath. Then, "I would've ignored it, I was posting for fun anyway! Bing ge also knew I posted. But this person.. is using a dick joke as their name? And they just wouldn't stop asking for Bing ge. I just thought you should know."

A dick joke as their name.

Shen Yuan's breath hitched. Almost stuttering as he asked, "Did he.. did he give you his number?"

Shen Ziyi frowned. "He did. Address too." She took her phone back, searching through her private messages. "Got anyone in mind?"

Shen Yuan didn't answer. But when Shen Ziyi handed him her phone, his suspicion was confirmed.

Airplane Shooting Towards the Sky.

Airplane Bro.

Shen Yuan ended up telling Shen Ziyi.

He told her everything; from waking up as Shen Qingqiu and coming back here with the novel's protagonist. It was the only way to get Airplane Bro's number from her—she wouldn't give it until her brother explained why he seemed familiar with someone with a dick joke as their username!

Shen Yuan had tried contacting him a few times before. He left comments on PIDW to let Airplane Bro know that he was back. The comments ended up getting mass reported as hate speech by the diehard fans and his account got suspended!

"So he's from.. a book?" Shen Ziyi asked once his brother was done explaining. "And you transmigrated as his evil Shizun?"

Shen Yuan nodded.

"But you ended up doting on him and he became your precious, little disciple? Innocent white lotus? And you still pushed him into the.. what, that world equivalent of hell?"

Shen Yuan frowned because he definitely did *not* put it that way. But his sister got the point anyway, so he nodded.

"And this Airplane guy is the author of the shitty novel you hated so bad, you transmigrated?"

Sighing, he nodded once more.

"You're insufferable." Shen Ziyi sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose as if the new information hurt her head. She took the explanation surprisingly well though. "And the whole.. commentary of your swordsmanship?"

"He had meant a literal sword," Shen Yuan confirmed, ignoring the glare.

Shen Ziyi was then silent, seeming to process the whole thing. Her voice was small when she finally spoke, "Tell me, ge."

"Mm?"

"He doesn't know his own birthday, does he?" She asked, fingers absentmindedly fiddling with the blanket.

"I don't think he does," Shen Yuan answered. He didn't know either.

"So that's.. why." She sighed. "Mama told me to ask, you know how she is with birthdays. So I asked Bing ge. And he said his birthday is.. every year. I was quite offended because I thought he was being secretive. I mean, after all the things we've been through! I thought we're family! But he.. really doesn't know. I should probably apologize for assuming bad things.."

Alright, Shen Yuan was a little touched. He raised his sister right! But then he couldn't be proud for too long because: "Mama what?" and before his sister could answer, he was already looking at her in horror. "She knows?"

As if realizing she just said something she wasn't supposed to say, Shen Ziyi let out an awkward chuckle. Slowly getting up from the bed as she muttered, "You know Xing ge can't keep secrets from her."

And now she mentioned their eldest brother! Shen Yuan was too shocked to say a word!

"Or maybe it was Zhengfei ge! Maybe he sent her the video?" Shen Ziyi asked, carefully taking some steps back. "I don't know! Who else would tell her?! And Baba said to bring your boyfriend along the next time we visit."

Now Shen Yuan was horrified. Head processing.

Shen Ziyi's hand was already on the doorknob when Shen Yuan shrieked, "Baba knows?!"

She smiled. The door was opened. Then she ran.

After spending the day questioning nearly everyone in the house, Shen Yuan was faced with the shocking revelation that: *everyone* thought Luo Binghe was his lover.

And Luo Binghe *knew.* Yet he chose not to say a thing!

Even worse than that: his *whole* family knew too. How did the fake news spread so fast?! If it had reached his Mama, then the bunch of aunties who had been trying to set him up on dates for years would know too! How outrageous!

Not to mention the whole internet sensation thing. Right, sure. This time people thought of him as this mysterious knife fairy's manager. But until when? This so-called fairy was very touchy even in public! It would only take a few, what, weeks? Days? For people to figure out they were lovers! Which was very wrong!

Shen Yuan was fuming as he stormed into his room. And the culprit was there! On his bed! With his phone! Probably reading something shameless, looking at how quick he hid the phone! He thought Shen Yuan wouldn't know?! The browser history wouldn't lie!

"Why are you not denying anything?" Shen Yuan asked, voice sounding more like a whine than anger.

"Denying what?" the disciple asked, arms spread open as he looked up at his Shizun. "Where have you been?"

Shen Yuan didn't answer. And he didn't—oh, trust him. He really did *not* mean to throw himself at Luo Binghe. But he did exactly just that. Letting himself be pulled to sit on the disciple's lap as he asked, "Why are you not denying that we're lovers.."

And Luo Binghe had the audacity to gasp! Asking, "We're not lovers?" and surprising Shen Yuan even more by saying, "But lovers sleep together.."

Luo Binghe!! You watched too many movies!! Shen Yuan wanted to scream! But instead he asked, "And what else do lovers do?" His gaze looked challenging as he looked up. Say something nasty and he swore he'd kick him out of the room! And confiscate his phone! No more reading!!

But Luo Binghe's eyes were wide as he spoke, "Go on dates?" He tilted his head, seeming to think for a while before offering, "Eat the foods their lover cooked for them?"

...now how would Shen Yuan stay mad at this?

"Yes." Shen Yuan exhaled, giving up. "Of course.."

And when Luo Binghe leaned in to kiss his cheek, Shen Yuan turned his face to meet his lips.

Because... Right. Lovers. Sealed with a kiss! Might as well make it real.

Chapter End Notes

shen yuan: *cuddles binghe* *noms on his cheeks* *buys him nice stuff* *kithes* *feeds him* *PAMPERS HIM***

also shen yuan: ....PEOPLE THOUGHT WE'RE A THING?!

...sighs.

*) notes: SY has two older brothers like in canon, i gave them oc name and it's Shen Yixing (oldest) and Shen Zhengfei (2nd bro)! His brothers are already married with children, and Shen Yuan is definitely the children's favorite shushu!

their parents live somewhere far from the busy city, enjoying their retirement days but still very much doting on their children. and yay! that's it for the day. we'll (probably) meet airplane bro next!

Chapter 16: I'm precious!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shen Yuan woke up to an empty bed.

Luo Binghe had been clinging to him like crazy lately, it felt weird to be in bed and *not* holding him.

The room was still dimly lit and there was no light seeping from the curtains, yet Luo Binghe was already up. Not facing him, standing with his back a little hunched.

He was about to call out for the disciple when he noticed Luo Binghe was doing.. something with his hand. Then his gaze fell to the.. is that ironing board?!

How did they have that in their room?! The clock showed that it was only an hour past midnight. Why would Luo Binghe be up ironing clothes!

Shen Yuan thought the disciple had only hand-washed their clothes and left the ironing part to someone else. But he'd been doing this too all along? And *at* this hour?

He felt upset for not noticing. Though when he looked at the black sleeve dangling from the board, his heart immediately softened.

It was Luo Binghe's favorite hoodie. Maybe he wanted to wear that for tomorrow's date? Would that explain why he took extra time preparing? Shen Yuan tilted his head as he kept watching.

He knew if he asked the disciple to come to bed now, he'd go back and finish what he was doing once Shen Yuan fell asleep. So he might as well wait. Besides, it was kind of cute to see him struggling with the cord.

After their first kiss, Luo Binghe had insisted that they go on many dates. Of course Shen Yuan complied. They went to the mall almost everyday! He had offered to go somewhere else, but Luo Binghe had looked so hesitant they ended up going to the mall again.

Everyone had now known them as lovers. Pictures of them were literally all over the internet; the knife fairy and his *rich* boyfriend.

Luo Binghe had treated the posts as his free, unlimited stock of phone wallpaper. He'd complain if the watermarks were too big. He'd even wish for some pictures to be taken from different angles! Where did the disciple learn all of these? Shen Yuan didn't even know.

He couldn't even get mad at people for taking pictures of them. How could he, when Luo Binghe had been saving the pictures oh-so-happily? He'd even pay people to take pictures for them if that meant he could see more of that smile!

When his identity was discovered, people had shifted their focus from the knife fairy to the *ST group's third son.* Shen Yuan also came to the shocking discovery that he was actually okay with it.

His brothers though..

Shen Zhengfei had laughed at him so hard, Shen Yuan hung up when his brother started wheezing.

Meanwhile his eldest brother, knowing that his baby brother wasn't fond of media exposure, had offered to take down all the posts—and all those magazines and newspapers because yes, it had gotten *that* bad. Shen Yuan politely declined, shocking even himself and his brother.

"It'll die down," he had said, a little too calm.

His brother was so confused he had to make sure, "You don't want to *make* it die down, but it *will* die down?"

"Mm," he hummed, pressing his ear more firmly to the phone so it wouldn't fall from his shoulder. Hands busy playing with Luo Binghe's soft curls. "It's okay, ge. I'm okay."

His phone calls with his parents weren't any different. Mama just kept! Laughing at him! No matter how much he hung up, she would just call again. And laughed. Then at some point, she cried! It was all so confusing, he ran to Shen Ziyi's room. But then his sister just started laughing at him too!

"Let her cry," she had said. "She's just happy. You've never really shown interest in dating before, you know? Mama had been worried whether it was because of the media."

Right. Shen Yuan's family was rich *rich*, the media loved them.

So Shen Yuan let his mother weep. Then when the call was switched to his father, he was faced with the question: "So are you bringing him over or should baba come there?"

Of course Shen Yuan said he'd visit. Soon, he promised!

So many things happened in these past few days that Shen Yuan just wanted to bury himself alive.

In Luo Binghe's arms, the tiny voice in his heart chirped. Then came the voice in his head. Roaring; *SHUT UP!!*

Anyways. What took Luo Binghe so long?!

When Shen Yuan focused back on the disciple, he noticed that the iron was unplugged. But Luo Binghe was still standing there. Waiting. And the sleeve of his favorite hoodie was still dangling. Was he not done ironing?

Shen Yuan frowned when he saw Luo Binghe plugging the iron back once more. He seemed to be adjusting the heat for a while before straightening up his back and waited. Shen Yuan

waited along with him.

The disciple took the hoodie and wrapped it around his hand, one hand holding up the iron. Then he pressed the iron against the fabric wrapped around his hand.

Luo Binghe!! That's not the way to iron clothes!! What's the ironing board for!!

Shen Yuan wanted to protest, but held himself back as he saw the disciple shaking his head. Good! He seemed to figure out that it was wrong too!

He kept watching Luo Binghe, nodding in approval as he saw him put the hoodie back on the ironing board. Though when Luo Binghe held up his free hand *and* the iron in his other hand, Shen Yuan jumped up from his bed so fast he almost fell.

He rushed to catch the disciple's wrist, gripping it quite hard as he shouted, "Are you dumb!"

Because *of course* Luo Binghe was going to *test* the heat. Shen Yuan should've known.

Luo Binghe couldn't trust machines.

Like that time he went *into* the washing machine to see for himself. Or that one time Shen Yuan asked for a mango juice and Luo Binghe just.. casually *poked* one of the blender's knives. And now he was going to… oh.

Shen Yuan was so mad, he reached to unplug the cord. "Put that down," he said, gesturing at the iron. Luo Binghe obliged.

"Don't you know that it's hot?" Shen Yuan tried to stay calm, though his voice seemed to hint otherwise. It didn't help that the other piece of clothing on the board belonged to him. Luo Binghe was trying to iron *his* shirt.

"I know.." Luo Binghe said, voice barely a whisper. "I'm afraid it'll ruin the clothes if it's too hot.."

That.. explained the little burn scars on the side of the disciple's wrist. He had thought it was from oil. Accidents in the kitchen. But.. this? Shen Yuan regretted not asking.

He *couldn't* stay calm. Raising his voice when he asked, "And you think it won't ruin your skin?!"

Luo Binghe flinched. Almost pulling his hand back as if the touch burned him.

Shen Yuan's grip was steady. He faltered when he looked up to find Luo Binghe looking at the floor, not daring to look up.

The sight gnawed on his heart in all the wrong way. Shen Yuan was obviously upset; at himself for not noticing, at Luo Binghe for not caring.

But looking at Luo Binghe like this..

"I'm sorry," he ended up saying, bringing the disciple's hand close to his lips. He pressed a kiss on the side of his wrist. Whispering, "I'm sorry.."

Luo Binghe whimpered, hand balling into a fist. His voice broke when he spoke, "Why are you sorry.."

He tried to pull his hand free. Shen Yuan didn't let him.

He gently pried the disciple's fingers open, unclenching his fist before peppering kisses all over his palm. Lingering a little longer on the scar left by the blender knife.

"You don't get to choose to heal or keep scars here," Shen Yuan tried explaining. "It'll take a while to heal, even longer to fade. Some won't even fade."

"Binghe, *this* body is different. You should be more careful." He squeezed the disciple's hand, searching for his eyes as he asked, "You hear me?"

Luo Binghe avoided his gaze. Nodding.

"Hey," Shen Yuan called, squeezing his hand once more. "Look at me."

Luo Binghe still didn't look up. Shen Yuan sighed, lifting the disciple's hand up close to his face. "This is precious," he said, bringing it even closer when Luo Binghe moved his head back in reflex. "Binghe, look at your hand."

Luo Binghe did. His eyes followed his hand even when Shen Yuan pulled it back to his lips; kissing his palm once more.

Now that he looked at his Shizun, he couldn't tear his gaze away.

"This is precious," Shen Yuan murmured, pressing more kisses into his palm. When he finally stopped, he looked up at Luo Binghe. Lips still inches away from his hand. Saying, "You're precious."

Luo Binghe looked like he was in a daze. He slowly pulled his hand away from Shen Yuan's grip, holding the tenderly kissed hand close to his chest. His other hand wrapped around it protectively as he whispered, "This is precious.."

Only this..? Shen Yuan said you! Was he doing this on purpose, to make him repeat his words? But the look on his face.. it.. no. He didn't fake it. He really did *not* get it.

Shen Yuan gritted his teeth. Saying, "Get on the bed."

Still clutching on his own hand, Luo Binghe nodded. He didn't want to upset his Shizun! But maybe.. his Shizun wouldn't want to see his face? He had.. raised his voice at him after all. There was no way he could stand looking at his face.

Luo Binghe lay down on his stomach, just to be careful. Face flush against the pillow.

Though when he felt something warm and soft on the heel of his foot, he turned over right away. Eyes growing wide at the sight.

Shen Yuan just kissed his foot!!

"Shizun," he choked out, almost panicked. "It's dirty!"

Shen Yuan's face was too close to his feet, Luo Binghe could've swore he felt himself accidentally kicking him when he rolled over before! He panicked even more. Not daring to move.

But Shen Yuan's voice was gentle when he spoke, patting on his leg. "Turn over."

Luo Binghe did.

And Shen Yuan just started to.. kiss him all over. His legs. Thighs. Waist. Whispering, "This is precious too." at every new area he kissed. Sometimes adding, "You're precious."

Shen Yuan was kissing up Luo Binghe's back when he realized the disciple had been crying. His shoulders shook, voice muffled by the pillow.

He froze. Though when he leaned closer and heard that Luo Binghe had been chanting *I'm precious* under his breath, Shen Yuan resumed. Pressing his lips against his shoulder.

"You are," he confirmed. Gently brushing away the disciple's hair to pepper kisses up his neck. "I don't like seeing you getting hurt," he whispered, kissing that little spot on the back of his ear.

Luo Binghe sobbed even more. "I'm.. precious?" A questioning lilt to his voice. "Shizun doesn't like me hurting.."

"Mm." Shen Yuan moved to kiss the other side of his neck. Then when he finished kissing up to his head, he stroked the disciple's arm. Asking, "Can you turn around for me?"

Luo Binghe slowly did. Shen Yuan hovered above him, hands on each side of the disciple's body. Caging him.

Luo Binghe closed his eyes when Shen Yuan leaned in to kiss his forehead. Both his eyelids. His nose. He whined when he felt it against his lips.

"You're precious," Shen Yuan whispered as he slightly pulled away, breath ghosting against his lips.

Luo Binghe was still crying. But his lips seeked for that warmth, claiming his love once more in a kiss.

He tilted his head, baring his skin as Shen Yuan moved down to his neck. Pressing gentle kisses down his throat.

Luo Binghe choked out a sob. His eyes snapped open when Shen Yuan reached his chest, hand immediately hoisting his lover up as he shook his head. Begging with his eyes. "No.. please." He sobbed, shaking his head even more. "I can't.. it feels too much. I.."

It felt too much. Luo Binghe was feeling too much, his chest could burst. It scared him somehow. The flood of.. emotions. It felt so strong it scared him.

"It's full right here?" Shen Yuan asked, placing one hand on the disciple's chest. Luo Binghe almost shuddered at the touch, whimpering as he nodded. "Do you want to cry it out?"

He once again nodded. Breathing out a sigh in relief as Shen Yuan moved to lie down next to him.

Shen Yuan guided the disciple to lie on his side, tucking Luo Binghe's head under his chin as he held him from behind. Palm resting on his chest.

"Okay," he said, slowly moving his hand to caress the disciple's chest. "You can cry."

And Luo Binghe did. Asking, "I'm precious?" in between his sobs. Shen Yuan never failed to answer.

"You're precious," he confirmed each time the question reached him.

Luo Binghe was clutching his lover's hand so tight by the time he calmed down. Shen Yuan didn't stop to caress his chest though, still stroking even when he could only move his thumb.

The last words that came out from Luo Binghe's lips before he fell asleep didn't need an answer.

It was not a question.

It was a statement; "I'm precious."

Luo Binghe was being followed.

Not that he actually minded, he liked having Shen Yuan around! But he literally followed him *everywhere,* it had gotten to the point he learned to lock the bathroom door! He never did that before!!

Luo Binghe had learned new fears;

The fear of having someone knock on the bathroom door when you're peacefully doing your business with the toilet being so far away from the *unlocked* door.

The fear of watching his lover messing up the kitchen in Luo Binghe's cucumber apron, insisting that he *could* cook when he couldn't even tell the difference between garlic and onions.

"I know what they look like when they're peeled," Shen Yuan had defended himself, peeling the onion like it had personally offended him. He looked so fierce like that! In his contrastingly cute apron!

It did things to Luo Binghe, alright. Unexplainable things. Hence the *fear*.

Shen Yuan just wouldn't leave him alone!! He'd follow him to the kitchen. He'd watch him cook, sometimes even offering himself to cook. He'd spend hours playing with his hair. Not brushing it or anything, just twisting and curling with his fingers! It felt nice.

He'd also crouch down next to him whenever he went out to talk to the flowers—Luo Binghe had heard that talking to them would make them grow faster, so he kept doing that. But his Shizun had stood up so abruptly when he asked him to do the same thing!

He'd snuggle *every* time they sat next to each other. This one was nice.

Actually, it all felt really nice.

Except for one thing: he'd knock on the bathroom door whenever Luo Binghe took too long. Asking, "Are you okay?"

And Luo Binghe would inwardly groan because..

Shizun!! You said this body is different!! You're right!! Constipation exists!! Have some mercy and save this disciple some face!!

But other than that, things were great!

Luo Binghe had also learned to let go of one scary, old fear.

"Shizun," he called.

"Mm?" Shen Yuan hummed, tilting his head a bit. Not turning around to face him, eyes focused on the pot.

It was one of those days he offered himself to cook! Luo Binghe was obviously delighted. More apron contents!! (He insisted he needed to wear *that* even to boil water. All professionals do it in cooking shows! Shen Yuan sighed but complied anyway.)

"Shizun," he called once more.

This time Shen Yuan took a glance at him. But only a glance!! A very quick one! "I'm cooking," he said.

Very determined!! Very cute!! But: "It's just instant noodles, you won't mess it up."

Wrong. The last time he distracted him, the water had evaporated completely; it left two portions of very poor-looking noodles in the pot.

Shen Yuan wasn't answering, so Luo Binghe tried again. "Shizun," he called. "Will you please look at me for a bit?"

He said please! Of course Shen Yuan turned to look at him. "What is it?"

And of course Luo Binghe took it as a chance to bully his Shizun! Asking, "Am I precious to you?"

Shen Yuan immediately turned back around at the question. Ears *very* visibly turning red, Luo Binghe couldn't help but giggle!

And the answer still came. Barely a whisper, but enough to shut the disciple up: "You are."

Now it was Luo Binghe's turn to blush!! And poor noodles got stirred up so vigorously, he felt pity on them! Shizun!! Stop abusing noodles!!

"Shizun!"

Shen Yuan didn't turn to look at him this time, but it was okay.

His back was no longer a scary sight.

Chapter End Notes

so. a little early update (and still no airplane bro yet))) hahahah,,, i think a part of binghe was scared of seeing sy's back because he's afraid he wouldn't turn when he call for him.. that he'd get left behind and he wouldn't be able to chase him.. but it's all good now! he knows that he's precious!!! ((and definitely will never make his shizun forget his own words))

today was a rough day for me and writing this had put my mind a little at ease. I hope reading these two (((lovers))) being in love could bring a smile to your face as well♡

Chapter 17: lovers' quarrel?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Is it still not updated?"

Luo Binghe looked up, head still rested against his lover's shoulder as he held up the phone in his hand. Asking, "This?"

Shen Yuan hummed, threading his fingers through the disciple's soft curls. "You keep rereading," he said, free hand reaching to scroll up the online novel the disciple had been reading. "It only got one chapter?"

"How did you know I kept rereading?" Luo Binghe asked, fixing his sitting position to take a better look at his lover.

"I've been reading too." Shen Yuan took the phone into his hand. "I think I've memorized the whole first paragraph by now."

The disciple had been *really* into reading lately, he refused to go anywhere! It helped tone down the news a little though.

They'd spend their time snuggling on the couch; Luo Binghe's head on either his lover's lap or shoulder as he read from his phone. And Shen Yuan would just.. play with his hair. And nom on his cheek once he got bored.

It was also his way of saying *pay attention to me!!!* without making it too obvious.

He'd offer snacks, but Luo Binghe would say no and steal a kiss instead. "Why order sweets when this is much sweeter?" he'd say.

The first time it happened, Shen Yuan was too taken aback to say a word. He had only gaped as the disciple just.. casually.. resumed reading. Like nothing happened.

How could he say that with his eyes still *on* the screen! How did he even steal a kiss!! It all happened so fast, Shen Yuan couldn't think!

Though after his fifth time hearing the corny line, Shen Yuan just stopped offering. No snack time! No more!

"You should've told me you're reading too," Luo Binghe mumbled, putting his arms around his lover's waist as he snuggled even closer. "I could've held the phone higher so we both could read."

Noticing that the novel was actually completed and it needed coins to unlock, Shen Yuan frowned. "Did you forget my password?"

He had taught him how to purchase things like this! Though the disciple still couldn't use the pinyin input keyboard, he had memorized how to type the password. He'd been using that to buy coins before too!

"Or we could've used the computer," Luo Binghe said, definitely not answering as he untangled himself from his lover. "The screen is bigger! But you have to type in the title for me. The computer wouldn't listen to what I say."

"I didn't plug in any mic, the computer can't hear you." Shen Yuan pulled the disciple back into his arms when he tried to stand up. Then he asked again, "Did you forget my password?"

Luo Binghe gasped! "It can't hear me?"

"It can't," Shen Yuan confirmed. "Why didn't you purchase the coins?"

"So that's why the computer didn't do any of my commands?" Luo Binghe pouted, climbing up his lover's lap and buried his face on the crook of his neck. Mumbling, "I thought it's just rebelling.."

"Aren't you the one rebelling." Shen Yuan tugged on the disciple's hair, leaving him no choice but to look up. "You're avoiding my question."

The stern expression on his face was enough to make Luo Binghe whine.

"What's wrong?" He asked, still not letting go of his hair to keep him in place. "You kept refusing to go out. It's been like, what. A week since we ate cakes? And that's weird because you *love* cakes. I mean, I could understand if you wanted more time to binge read something. I used to do that too. But you've been reading the same thing over and over again! What happened to that lovers go on many dates thing? What is it that I do wrong for you to choose this over going out with me? You don't even look at me when you read."

Luo Binghe's eyes grew wide as Shen Yuan went on with his words. He couldn't hold back his tears when his Shizun finished talking; sobbing right into his chest as he felt the grip on his hair loosening.

Shen Yuan sighed. Letting his fingers run through the disciple's hair as he said, "What did I say about talking things out.."

He just sat there, letting his lover cry in his arms without knowing the exact reason why. It was.. quite confusing, Shen Yuan didn't know what to say. Even more confusing when the disciple finally spoke;

"I don't want to be homeless.."

Now this one deserved scolding!!

Shen Yuan wanted to give him a lecture on how a relationship works—how not all the roads are smooth but they could go through even the rockiest path if they *talk* it out! That communication is the key!! But all that came from his mouth was, "You think I'd kick you out?"

"No!" Luo Binghe pushed himself up right away. "I'm precious to you, you won't kick me out! But the bank.. the bank.. What if we run out of money and have the house taken from us? Cards are dangerous. You kept using cards!"

….?

Shen Yuan gaped.

The lack of response made Luo Binghe cry even more! He clutched on the fabric of his lover's shirt, searching for his eyes as he asked, "Is it.. is it too late? Have we run out of money already? Will the bank-" he couldn't even finish his words! Wailing at the thoughts!

Shen Yuan finished the question for him, "Will the bank take the house from us?"

Luo Binghe nodded. "You keep.. buying me.. expensive things," he managed to speak between his sobs. "I don't get how the card could grant me a lot of nice things. But it turns out you have to pay for it later? And if you can't pay, you will…" he clutched on his shirt even tighter. "I like going out with you, but you keep using your card."

"That's why you don't want to go on dates anymore?"

Luo Binghe nodded. "I told Granny how we could still eat cakes from home without cards," he said, sniffling. "But then I learned that the password is connected to your card as well!"

Luo Binghe looked so miserable, Shen Yuan had no heart to laugh. He still couldn't hold it back though. Laughing as he reached to cup his lover's cheeks. "You've been worrying over this?"

He just.. cried even more. Shen Yuan squished his cheeks because Binghe!! Stop!! Feeling another wave of laughter bubbling up his chest, he pulled the disciple in for a kiss.

Luo Binghe didn't return the kiss. Shen Yuan kissed him anyway; teasing on the disciple's lower lip until he whined and tried to pull away.

The disciple tried to look stern as he spoke, "This is a serious matter.."

Shen Yuan faked a gasp. Asking, "It is?"

Luo Binghe nodded. Though when he tried to explain *why,* his lover just kept.. squishing his cheeks. "A very ser-wious matt-twer. What if we.. got kwiick.. Stop!!"

He let out a frustrated groan. How could he deliver a *very* serious speech like this!! And his lover had the audacity.. to laugh?? Luo Binghe was so upset, he pinched his tummy!

Shen Yuan just laughed even more. This time squishing the disciple's cheeks as he pulled him closer, giving a peck on his pouty lips. "Did you even read the news?" He asked as he pulled away.

The fear in Luo Binghe's eyes was so apparent he ended up breaking it out to him, "I'm rich!"

Luo Binghe was sniffling, head still not quite right to process the words.

"Binghe, repeat after me." Shen Yuan leaned in to kiss the tip of his nose before saying, "My boyfriend is rich."

Luo Binghe wrinkled his nose. Croaking out, "My boyfriend.. is rich?"

Shen Yuan gave him a nod of encouragement. Saying, "I can get anything! Everything! I want and my boyfriend won't run out of money."

This, too, was repeated with much hesitation in his voice, "I can.. get anything? I want..? And my boyfriend won't run out of money..?"

Look. Shen Yuan wasn't the type to brag about his possession. But his lover was worrying about *money,* out of all things! This was necessary.

"This boyfriend has enough money to last us a lifetime," he said, assuring him. "Binghe wouldn't have to worry."

Luo Binghe was quiet for a while.

"My boyfriend.." he started, voice barely a whisper as he spoke. Shen Yuan nodded and squished his cheeks to encourage him. Yes, this boyfriend is rich! Say it out loud!

What came out from his mouth next though, was a high-pitched shriek; "Doesn't have a job!"

….?

Binghe..

"How.. how do you earn money.. when all you do is laze around and spoil me.. you don't even.. wear suits to work.. but I don't want you to work.. what if.. you find.. a pretty secretary.. and punish him.. na.. naked.. on the.. on the.. desk.. after he spilled your coffee on the documents you need to sign.. what if.."

How was Shen Yuan supposed to respond to this?

He just *knew* he had to give his sister a good smack on the head later though.

"Stories like that aren't real," Shen Yuan ended up saying. "Do I look like that kind of person to you? What kind of punishment is that even!"

The disciple tilted his head as if to think. "I wouldn't mind.." he whispered, feeling warmth creeping up his neck. "I mean. I wouldn't mind.. getting punished like that. Bent over the desk. The secretary looked like he was.. having fun."

Now how did it go from money concerns to this..? He should really pay more attention to the disciple's reading list.

"How about no cakes for a month?" He offered. "That sounds more like a punishment to me."

Luo Binghe, who had stopped crying, sniffled once more! "But you said I can get anything I want.."

"You want cakes?"

Luo Binghe nodded.

"No punishments then?"

Luo Binghe shook his head!

But then he hesitated. Asking, "We won't turn poor if we keep ordering cakes? Even when you don't have a job?"

Shen Yuan sighed. Wiping the tears away from his lover's cheeks as he confirmed, "We won't."

"And we won't turn poor if we keep unlocking chapters? I can buy coins to read?"

"Yes." He nodded, patting his cheek. "But I have to make sure whether the story is safe before you start reading."

Luo Binghe didn't know what that meant, but he nodded anyway. "We can go on dates again?"

"We can."

And the most important question: "Can we order lemon cake?" He tilted his head, gulping at the mere thoughts of the cake before adding, "Now..? The whole cake. Not a slice."

The disciple was already reaching for his lover's phone before the answer came. He knew what it'd be anyway.

"We can," said Shen Yuan, pulling his lover into his arms. Squeezing him. "What do I do with you, really.."

"We can kiss." Luo Binghe wriggled out of his arms, hand immediately going up to shield his face as he added, "After I order!"

Shen Yuan snorted. Saying, "It's not like I want to kiss you now."

Hearing this, Luo Binghe looked up from the phone screen. The slight raise of his eyebrows was enough to make his lover groan.

"You don't believe me?" Shen Yuan asked.

"I saw you puckering up your lips just before," Luo Binghe stated.

"No, you didn't." Shen Yuan moved his hands to the disciple's waist, trying to lift him off his lap but failing to do so. "You're imagining things."

"Oh?" Luo Binghe shifted a bit, cupping his lover's cheek with one hand as he leaned closer. "You don't want to kiss?"

"I don't," Shen Yuan gritted out, face now inches away from his lover. His body seemed to betray his pride though. And just as their lips were about to touch, Luo Binghe pulled away! Grinning so wide as he patted his cheek!

"You do want it," he said, having the audacity to *giggle* at his lover's misery.

Who taught him to be a tease?!!

Chapter End Notes

somebody take the internet away from him nOW

Chapter 18: full-time lover

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luo Binghe woke up to a loud scream.

His initial reaction, of course, was to shield Shen Yuan from any harm. He held him tighter. Not getting up from his position on top of his lover.

But the scream got even louder!!

Shen Yuan tried to wriggle free from underneath him, but Luo Binghe kept him in place. Saying, "Don't move."

He couldn't recognize the screaming voice. It was very high-pitched! Did not belong to Shen Ziyi. Definitely did not belong to Granny either! Could there be an intruder?!

He felt dread pooling in his stomach as he turned his head to see that the door was opened. Nobody was there though. Yet the screaming got even.. louder. Closer.

A ghost?!!!

"What ha-"

Luo Binghe shoved his cheek to his lover's mouth. Shutting him up.

Rule number one: don't make sounds!! Luo Binghe had watched quite many horror movies already to understand that one.

Shen Yuan bit his cheek, yet he didn't even budge. He needed to find the ghost before it could hurt his lover. Or anyone in the house. Luo Binghe hoped he wasn't too late.

There was a loud shriek, then this screaming.. *ghost* started crying! Luo Binghe pushed himself up and pressed his palm against his Shizun's mouth, voice thick with urgency as he tried to assure him, "I'll protect you."

Shen Yuan's eyes were wide but he nodded anyway. Fingers circling around his lover's wrist as he pried his hand off his face. "Who's cry-"

And the hand was back covering his mouth. "Ssh."

Then the crying ghost wailed; "SHUSHU!"

...not a ghost?

“Shushu!” the voice cried once more. This time Luo Binghe could see tiny hands on the edge of the bed; followed by the sight of the most.. Adorable! Child! In the world! Very teary, but

adorable nonetheless.

She looked so much like the mini version of his lover, Luo Binghe would think she's his secret daughter if only she hadn't cried for her Shushu.

Shen Yuan seemed to notice her presence too. Seeing his niece crying like that, he pushed Luo Binghe off of him. The little girl took it as a cue for her to climb up the bed and protect her Shushu!

The two adults in the room sat up. Shen Yuan with his arms spread open to embrace his niece, Luo Binghe with his mouth falling open at the sight. His lover still got that messy, fluffy bed hair and his expression was really soft when the little girl jumped into his arms.

So cute!! Luo Binghe wanted to squeal!!

"Are you here alone?" Shen Yuan asked, pulling his niece—Shen Yanxue to sit on his lap as he patted the girl's head. "Where's your Baba?"

"Downstairs," the little girl sobbed. "Wanted to.. surprise Shushu… but.." she sobbed even more.

Luo Binghe would very much fight whoever it was that made her cry!!

She pulled away to look up at her Shushu, one hand raised to wipe her tears. "Why is there.. a bad guy.. in your room.." she sniffled.

Where?! Kid, tell your Shushu's lover and he WOULD fight!

"Bad guy?" Shen Yuan asked, throwing a confused look at Luo Binghe who by now had his eyes scanning the room. He turned his gaze back to his niece then. Asking, "Where?"

Yeah. Where?!

"There!"

Luo Binghe had never turned his face that quick! He wanted to see! Where?!

But the tiny finger was.. pointing at him?

"What is he doing on top of you.." the girl cried even more! Clinging to her Shushu as she screeched, "What if Shushu deflates!"

Shen Yuan couldn't even hold back his laughter.

He laughed so hard, he only stopped when he noticed the tears about to fall from his lover's eyes!

He cleared his throat then, guiding his niece's hand down not to point at the poor disciple. "He's not a bad guy," Shen Yuan said. Clearing his throat once more to stop himself from laughing at the disciple's eager nods. "Right?"

“Not bad,” Luo Binghe agreed.

Shen Yanxue had stopped crying. Her gaze was hesitant when she looked at Luo Binghe, though it turned hopeful once she looked at her Shushu. Asking, “Not bad?”

Shen Yuan hummed. “Mm. You know how it tends to get cold at night?” He reached to brush her hair away from her face, smiling fondly once she nodded her head. “Well, I get cold too sometimes. He’s just helping me to stay warm.”

Her eyes widened at his words, head unconsciously leaning at her Shushu’s touch as she asked, "He means well?"

“He means well,” Shen Yuan confirmed, patting her cheek. “And you hurt his feelings. Won’t you apologize?”

The little girl slowly turned to look at Luo Binghe, who was very.. quiet during the entire thing. His gaze was lowered down, afraid of what she might think of him. He knew that she, too, was precious to his lover. He didn’t want to make a bad impression.

When she reached out for him, he couldn’t help but flinch. Her words wasn’t as he expected it to be though;

“I’m sorry..”

Luo Binghe could’ve sworn his heart just skipped a beat.

Sensing that he wouldn’t take the initiative, Shen Yanxue got off her Shushu’s lap to give Luo Binghe a hug. Saying, "Thank you for keeping Shushu warm."

Her arms felt so small around his neck! Luo Binghe was unsure on what to do. Though when he looked at his lover, Shen Yuan was smiling at him. At *them.*

He slowly put one arm around her, voice soft as he spoke, “You’re welcome..”

And just like that, they became best friends!

Soon after, Shen Yanxue was literally hopping down the stairs with Luo Binghe panicking behind her.

“You’re not a bunny!” Luo Binghe tried to reason. “Don’t hop!”

“But I like—uAAH.” The scream was soon followed by a fit of giggles and a statement; “I’m a bird!”

Luo Binghe ended up carrying her down the stairs.

It was very cute seeing him worried like that, Shen Yuan wished he had brought his phone to capture the moment!

She only tried to wriggle free from him once her father was in sight. “Baba, Baba!” she called, running toward him once Luo Binghe put her down. “That handsome gege helps warm Shushu’s bed!”

……kid.

Under his brother's scrutinizing stare, Shen Yuan wanted to run!!

“I didn’t say it like that,” he tried to defend himself, both hands held up in surrender. Though he immediately put them down once Luo Binghe tried to hide behind him, fingers gripping on his lover’s wrist to keep him in place. “Don’t hide.”

They were still in their pajamas; didn’t even have time to check themselves in the mirror because Shen Yanxue had dragged them down once the *bad guy* matter was settled.

“You look good,” Shen Yuan assured him. Unlike in their past world, their morning looks weren’t as flawless as they used to be. Shen Yuan knew Luo Binghe was aware of that too. He had, a few times, caught the disciple brushing his hair before snuggling back into his arms to wish him a good morning.

No matter how soft it felt, Luo Binghe’s hair could get a little bit.. wild in the morning.

“Is this the one?” Shen Zhengfei asked, picking up his daughter into his arms. “Knife fairy?”

“My boyfriend, yes,” said Shen Yuan, surprising even himself at how easy the words came out from his mouth.

“He stopped denying?” came another *very* familiar voice.

Shen Yuan turned around in horror because.. what was his eldest brother doing here?!

“Aren’t you supposed to be in Singapore!”

“I didn’t know my baby brother had been keeping track of my business trips?” his eldest brother—Shen Yixing chuckled. He had his arms spread open. And what was Shen Yuan supposed to do?! Of course he’d tackle him into a hug.

Luo Binghe wasn’t left alone for long though, Shen Ziyi was on his side right away and he seemed very grateful for that.

Shen Yuan just couldn’t help himself when it came to his eldest brother. The age gap was so big, he had only been spoiled! The fights were reserved only for his second brother. And his sister, if that counted.

“He stopped denying,” Shen Ziyi confirmed, patting Luo Binghe’s arm to calm him down. He seemed very tense, even the little chirpy child noticed.

She reached out for her new favorite gege, calling, “Warm gege, warm gege!”

And Shen Yuan just.. mentally cursed in his head because in front of his eldest brother, he was supposed to be a *very* innocent kid.

“You did not hear that,” he said as he pulled away from the hug. “Right?”

Shen Yixing raised an eyebrow at that. Asking, “That he keeps your bed warm?”

Shen Yuan let out a frustrated groan. But he couldn’t even get frustrated for long! Because…

“Where did all my children go!”

...his father's voice.

Now who brought the whole family here…?

Not that Shen Yuan was ungrateful, but give him a prior notice at least!

And now he had to face his inevitable fate: introducing the love of his life to the… loves of his life. Did that even make sense? Anyways.

Time to face the Shens.

“Distract the others,” Shen Yuan said, taking the scrunchie off his sister’s hair.

Shen Ziyi didn’t even complain, immediately ushering her two other brothers to the living room as she exclaimed, “I have an announcement to make!”

They all followed along, obviously. No one in this house could say no to this kid.

When everyone had left, Shen Yuan pulled his lover to sit down on the stairs. He sat down along with him, fingers immediately brushing through his soft curls. “It’s okay,” he said.

“I haven’t brushed my teeth,” Luo Binghe said, eyes pleading.

“It’s okay.” Shen Yuan convinced him by giving a peck on his lips. “No one will notice.”

“This is not the proper attire to meet in-laws.” The disciple tugged on his pajama sleeve. “Can’t we go up first?”

He knew it wasn’t polite to keep them waiting, but he just didn’t want to give a bad first impression!

“You go,” Shen Yuan said, patting his lover’s thigh. “I will-”

The disciple was already standing up when a voice cut his lover’s words off; “A-Yuan! Come here, your boyfriend too!”

Luo Binghe sat back down. He clutched on his lover’s hands, panicking.

As much as Shen Yuan would love to give him time, he knew exactly *why* they came. It was Luo Binghe they wanted to see! Not him.

“It’ll be fine.” Shen Yuan squeezed his hands. “It’ll be fine.”

“I do *not* look decent,” said Luo Binghe, voice a little hushed. “What if.. what if they don’t like me and offer me money or throw a glass of water to my face to keep me away from you?”

Shen Yuan wasn’t even surprised anymore at how wild his lover’s brain could go. The disciple’s modern dating reference was, after all, from books and tv shows.

“They won’t.” Shen Yuan let go of his lover’s hands to cup his cheeks, making him look into his eyes as he asked, “Do you trust me?”

Luo Binghe nodded right away.

“I trust them,” he said, pulling him closer to place a kiss on his forehead. Muttering, “You can trust them too.”

Luo Binghe brought his hand up, closing his fingers around his lover’s wrist as he asked, “And if they don’t like me..?”

Shen Yuan didn’t even need time to think. The answer was already there, on the tip of his tongue.

“They love me,” he stated. “They’ll love you too.”

Now that one.. Luo Binghe understood.

Things that Shen Yuan loved, Luo Binghe had grown to love them too. Including but not limited to: webnovels, idling in bed, movies, more idling in bed.

And people that he loved, he had grown to love them too. It was.. quite a confusing feeling. He used to be jealous of other people that had his Shizun’s attention, afraid that the spotlight would be stolen. But now he just kind of realized that he didn’t mind not constantly being his center of attention.

It was.. safe.

He felt safe.

This one wasn’t supposed to be any different.

So he closed his eyes. Taking a deep breath as he nodded. “Okay,” he finally said. Now saying out his new favorite mantra, “I’m precious to you.”

Shen Yuan chuckled as he squished his lover’s cheeks. “You are.”

“They won’t make you throw me away,” Luo Binghe said, a little questioning lilt in his voice.

“They won’t,” Shen Yuan confirmed, brushing the disciple’s hair away from his face before asking, “Do you want me to tie your hair?”

He helped his lover to turn around, knowing already what the answer would be. Luo Binghe still nodded to answer though, even when his hair was already gathered into his lover’s hands.

“Make it look good,” Luo Binghe pleaded.

“It already looks good,” said Shen Yuan, tying up his lover’s hair with the stolen scrunchie. “You look good.”

“I look like a lion.”

“Oooh, fierce.”

And what was Luo Binghe supposed to say to that?

Nothing! The smack on Shen Yuan’s thigh was a clear answer.

At his lover’s amused snort, Luo Binghe pouted. “Don’t tease," the disciple said. "Do I smell okay?"

Shen Yuan lifted his lover's ponytail a bit to sniff on his nape. Just in case he'd protest if he answered too fast. "You smell fine," he said, putting the hair back down as he pulled away.

Luo Binghe turned so fast, Shen Yuan let out a gasp!

"Just fine?" The disciple asked. "Not good, but fine?"

"You smell veeery good," Shen Yuan ended up saying, taking his lover's hand in his. "Perfect. Come on."

Luo Binghe seemed reluctant to get up. And by the time they finally walked into the living room, the disciple was holding onto his hand *very* tight.

Shen Yixing patted on the couch when he saw his brother. Shen Yuan of course went to his side, pulling Luo Binghe along with him as he took a seat.

Everyone was still talking, probably catching up. So he asked his brother, "Where's my nephew?"

"On the way with his mom. I went straight from the airport," Shen Yixing said, reaching to pinch his brother's cheek. "Won't you introduce your lover?"

And so Shen Yuan did. He caught everyone's attention by clearing his throat and just.. stood up, pulling Luo Binghe along with him.

"As you all already know," he started. "This is Luo Binghe, my.." he coughed, feeling everyone's gaze on him. "...my lover."

His ears were burning red by the time he sat back down.

Things after that were kind of a blur. So many questions, so little time given to answer! Shen Yuan tried his best to answer though.

"Where did you two meet?"

"Somewhere where the skies are very blue."

Shen Zhengfei snorted.

"Does he treat you well?"

"Yes."

"I'm asking him."

Luo Binghe immediately nodded. "Very well," he confirmed. "I'm very lucky."

"What do you do for a living?"

Luo Binghe was about to open his mouth, but Shen Yuan beat him to it. Saying, "Full-time lover."

He then lifted his hand to cover his eldest brother's mouth, who was very much gaping at his answer.

"What do you do for fun then?"

"He cooks," said Shen Yuan. "And bakes."

Luo Binghe nodded at this, agreeing.

Shen Yuan's mother smiled at this, tilting her head. "I suppose you're good at it?"

"Oh, he's very good." Shen Yuan answered for him. "I mean, look at me."

"You seem well-fed." His mother nodded in approval. "Look at those cheeks."

Then they talked about food! This time it was Luo Binghe who answered all the questions, seeming very eager when his lover's favorite foods were mentioned.

Shen Yuan wasn't really picky with food, but he didn't really eat much. Even he himself was surprised at how much he could eat these days!

His mother ended up disappearing to the kitchen nearing lunch, Luo Binghe eagerly following along behind her. He really loosened up after all those food talks, it was cute.

Shen Yuan took his time snuggling with his brother. This was good. It felt so long since he had seen them all gathered like this. And now with Luo Binghe.. it felt even more complete, somehow.

"You're blooming," Shen Yixing said, fingers threading through his little brother's hair.

Shen Yuan pulled away a bit to look up at him. Asking, "Blooming?"

"Mm. Like a flower." Shen Yixing nodded. A little smile made its way to his lips as he said, "It's like you've finally found your sun."

"Don't say things like that!" Shen Yuan groaned, bumping his forehead against his brother's shoulder. "Doesn't suit you, ge. Come on. Talk finance to me."

At this though, his brother only laughed. Patting his head as he mumbled, "You're blooming."

And maybe.. his words were right. Maybe.

Shen Yuan was just too shy to admit that.

Chapter End Notes

surprise visit!

Chapter 19: quack quack

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Mama bought him a phone.”

Shen Yuan almost choked on his yogurt. “Mama bought him a what?”

“A phone,” said Shen Ziyi, plopping down on the couch. “Bing ge tried to say no, but Mama insisted.”

“And he lets her?” Shen Yuan asked, feeling quite betrayed because the disciple always said no even when he insisted to buy him a phone!

“She bribed him with recipes,” Shen Ziyi said. “You think he could say no?”

Unfair!!

Shen Yuan didn’t even realize he was pouting until his niece pinched his lips. “Is Shushu a duck?” she asked, earning a chuckle from Shen Yixing. She looked at him with wide eyes then. Asking, “Bobo? Is Shushu a duck?”

“I don’t know,” Shen Yixing said, amusement clearly written all over his face as he offered, “Why don’t you try asking him to quack?”

Shen Yuan was already glaring at his Da-Ge. Since when did he learn how to bully?! He was supposed to be the kindest brother! Yet when Shen Yanxue turned her attention back to him, Shen Yuan mentally prepared himself to quack.

Those innocent eyes.. How could he say no..

The little girl pried her hand away from her Shushu’s lips. Asking very politely, “Can Shushu quack?”

Yes. Yes, of course he could.

He quacked.

“Shushu is a duck!” Shen Yanxue exclaimed, giggling happily! Even his nephew, who was very much focused on his phone ever since he arrived, snorted at that too.

Shen Yuan was glad his other brother wasn’t in the room. And Luo Binghe too.

His family was staying for the weekend and not even a full day passed, his mother and Luo Binghe were already inseparable. They all had lunch together before, with his father’s neverending praises for the disciple’s signature congee. He loved it very much!

“This is very good,” he had said. “I wish my children knew how to cook.”

Shen Yixing had only chuckled, being the only one of the four who could cook. Shen Ziyi pretended not to hear a word. Shen Yuan made airplane sounds as he fed his niece. Shen Zhengfei took it as a personal insult and declared, “I can cook!”

His wife had only shook her head amusedly at her competitive husband, with Shen Yanxue adding fuel to the fire: “Baba can’t cook!”

Shen Zhengfei had been staying in the kitchen since then, following Luo Binghe around and taking notes of his cooking lesson very obediently.

And when dinner was finally served, nobody said a word about the congee that tasted a little too salty. It wasn’t Luo Binghe’s. Shen Yuan knew even just by the look. Shen Zhengfei sat up so proud with his chest a little puffed, eyes turning wide when her daughter took a spoonful of the congee.

Shen Yanxue was very smart for her age. She thanked the chef—not specifying who, for the *very tasty* congee. And if it brought tears to her father’s eyes, nobody said a word! Luo Binghe was also very proud of his very first apprentice!

“He’s very determined,” Luo Binghe said once they were back in their room. “I was actually scared I had offended him, but turns out he just wanted to learn?”

Shen Yuan chuckled lightly, pulling his lover closer to his chest. “Did he bother you?”

Luo Binghe immediately shook his head. “Not at all!”

“Did Mama bother you?” Shen Yuan asked. “I heard she insisted on buying you a phone? You never agreed whenever I offered you one.”

At the mention of the phone, Luo Binghe’s eyes lit up as he reached for the said phone in his pocket. “It arrived very quick!” He pulled away a bit from his lover, lifting his phone up as he said, “Mama said I can use this to communicate with her.”

Shen Yuan suddenly forgot that he wanted to complain.

Mama..?

A shy smile made its way to the disciple’s lips as he brought the phone close to his chest. “She asked me to call her like that.”

“And you’re okay with that?” Shen Yuan asked, just to make sure. It made him feel.. things. Strange feelings that he couldn’t even name.

“Mm.” Luo Binghe nodded, turning to look at his lover. “I hope you don’t mi-”

“I don’t mind,” Shen Yuan said before the disciple could finish his words.

Luo Binghe searched for his eyes. Finding that his lover had meant his words, he let out a soft sigh. Snuggling closer as he closed his eyes. “Your family is very warm,” he said, voice barely a whisper. “It almost feels like I belong here..”

“Do you want to?” Shen Yuan asked before his mind could even process the words. Adding, “Belong here, I mean. Is it something that you want? Because I don’t want to force you into anything that you don’t wa-”

Luo Binghe snapped his eyes open and groaned. “Are you dumb!”

Shen Yuan gaped. Where did that come from?!

Though before he could say a word, Luo Binghe was already pinching his tummy. “Of course I do,” he said, almost whining. “Can’t you see that I’m happy here?”

“Oh.” Shen Yuan breathed out, fingers closing around the disciple’s hand. “You’re happy here?”

“I am.” Luo Binghe nodded firmly.

“Even when the skies aren’t as blue..?” Shen Yuan asked. “Even when you have to brush your teeth every morning? Even when you can’t heal scars at will? Even when I’m not as strong? Even when-”

Luo Binghe thought his lover needed to shut up.

And so he kissed him.

“His world revolves around his siblings.”

Luo Binghe looked up from the photo album on his lap. Saying, “He seems to love them a lot.”

“He does,” Mama agreed, chuckling softly as she turned the page. “Look, this one was taken after a fight.”

Luo Binghe followed her gaze. The picture she pointed at was of little Shen Yuan crying at what seemed to look like a hospital hall. Luo Binghe didn’t know whether he’d like to squeal at how *cute* his lover was or at the fact that he had his front tooth missing!

The photos he had seen before were all full of smiles and laughter, they were all very cute. He could feel the love radiating even just by seeing them. This one though! This one! He felt a very strong urge to keep this one!

“I didn’t know he could cry,” Luo Binghe said, almost in a daze.

It was true. Even the idea that his lover was once.. a child was still foreign to him.

“He rarely cries.” Mama traced her finger over the picture. When Luo Binghe looked up at her, she had a very fond smile on her face. “This was the first time his Da-Ge disagreed with him.”

“He never really said no to him, you see. Everything he wants, his Da-Ge would get it for him,” Mama added. She then looked up too, grinning at Luo Binghe. “Spoiled, isn’t he? Your lover.”

Luo Binghe couldn’t help but nod. Asking, “What made him cry like that?”

“Oh, he wanted to name his sister after a fictional robot,” Mama deadpanned. She straightened up, massaging her forehead as if the mere thoughts gave her a headache. “It was very chaotic. No one took his side. He was crying really hard, Granny had to bring him back home.”

…There was a fight between his heart and his mind. Which side was he on?! His lover’s side?! Or those that made his lover upset?! Luo Binghe couldn’t decide!

“You know, that animated show? I think it was called Gundam,” said Mama, taking the album onto her lap. “I forgot the name he wanted to use, but I was pretty sure he also wanted his sister’s name to have Gundam in it.”

Luo Binghe would apologize to his lover later for not taking his side.

“He said it was the strongest of their.. prototypes. He means well, I know. He wanted his little sister to grow up strong. But who would name their child after a robot like that? I wouldn’t!” Mama laughed as she shook her head. She asked Luo Binghe then, “I mean, would you?”

As much as he loved his lover… “I wouldn’t,” Luo Binghe answered.

“Good!” Mama patted his shoulder, still laughing. Luo Binghe also couldn’t hold back his laughter. Shizun!! Forgive this disciple!! He swore he would repent later!!

Mama turned the page once their laughter died down, Luo Binghe leaned closer to take a look. She told him stories of each picture, Luo Binghe listened to them all with a smile on his face. His lover really had a loving family, he was content to know that he grew up happy.

There were so many albums! They took their time going through them slowly though, Luo Binghe really liked spending time with her.

Mama halted when they reached a picture of Shen Yuan and Shen Yixing together, all grown up. Both of them were smiling really wide at the camera, with Shen Yixing’s arm around his little brother’s shoulder.

“The day his Da-Ge moved out of the house…” Mama started, turning to look at Luo Binghe who was already looking at her. “He stopped joining us for dinners.”

“He’d have only one meal a day,” she said. She held up two fingers then. Saying, “It used to be two. He usually wakes up very late. So lunch because he was hungry, dinner because his Da-Ge cooked for him.”

Luo Binghe frowned. “Only once a day?”

Mama nodded. “A-Fei had already moved out too that time, A-Yi had started to spend more of her time with her friends. Then when I moved out, the chefs were dismissed.”

Luo Binghe couldn’t help but ask, “Why did you move out?”

“It was an old promise that my husband and I made,” Mama said, smiling. “To spend our retirement days in the place where we first met. It was only a few hours away by car from here, so it wasn’t that far. Our children usually visit us too once a month. Besides...”

“This house is already under your lover’s name.” She chuckled lightly, adding, “It’s the only thing that he asked for, you see. This house. He doesn’t want any position in the company, doesn’t ask for any shares, doesn’t ask for anything else. Only this house.”

Luo Binghe was quiet. He, too, would ask for the same thing if he was in his lover’s position. Just by looking through the albums, he knew this house held so many memories for him. It was the place where he grew up. The place where he loved, and had all those loves returned to him. The place he hoped he could always return to.

Luo Binghe then thought of the bamboo house..

It used to be the bamboo house for him. He lost count on how many times he reached for the memories of living there for comfort when nothing else could help; the dreams in which he still lived with his Shizun were the only thing that used to keep him sane. The only thing that used to keep him going.

But now.. there were so many things!

He no longer needed to close his eyes to find the will to live. He no longer had to dream. No longer had to imagine things. He could just simply look up, and BAAM! New reasons to live!

“Last night..” Mama halted, looking into his eyes as she spoke, “I saw him hugging his Ba. Do you know what he said?”

Luo Binghe shook his head.

“He told his Ba that he missed him,” Mama said. “He told him that he missed him! Can you believe it?”

Mama looked excited, so Luo Binghe let out a soft chuckle. Nodding. He could very much believe it, yes.

“He talks a lot, but he doesn’t really speak his feelings out loud.” Mama tilted her head. Adding, “He tends to just show it. And to hear those words coming from him..”

“I’ve been avoiding him ever since,” she continued before Luo Binghe could even speak. “I don’t know what I’m more afraid of, hearing those words too for me. Or not hearing those words. I think I’d cry at both possibilities.”

Luo Binghe could understand her concerns. But he didn't need to think when he said, "He missed you."

Mama faked a gasp. "You think so?"

"Mm."

She turned serious then. "You think I should confront him? It's unfair that he only said that to his Ba."

Luo Binghe copied her expression, nodding firmly. "You should."

They looked at each other for a while, then they laughed.

Though they were interrupted when the door was suddenly opened.

Their heads were turned at the same time, immediately looking back at each other to exchange amused smiles. "Should I leave?" Luo Binghe asked, voice a little hushed.

"No. Later. I'm not ready," Mama said, whispering as she nudged the disciple.

Shen Yuan was looking at them with a pout. Almost whining when he asked, "Would you stop stealing my boyfriend?"

Mama gasped, laughing as she pushed Luo Binghe off his chair. "Here, take him!"

That caught the disciple off guard. He was quick to stand up though, approaching his lover who already spread his arms wide. "Thank you," Shen Yuan mumbled when he finally had his lover back in his arms. Mama only scoffed.

Shen Yuan was still in his pajamas! His hair was still a mess too! And it was still a little too early for him to wake up. He looked so adorable, Luo Binghe wanted to keep him forever!

"I woke up alone," Shen Yuan said as he pulled away.

"You don't have to anymore," Luo Binghe said, pulling him back into his arms as he pressed his lips against his forehead. "I'll stay."

Shen Yuan thought that it was still too early for his brain to think. So he just nodded, melting into his lover's embrace as he carried him back to their room. Back to their bed.

Then he fell asleep once more; safe in his lover's arms.

Chapter End Notes

heads up, i added a new tag!:o

((spoiler: identitiES reveal))))

Chapter 20: what's your chicken

Chapter Notes

> double update for this week because I can't get this out of my head
>
> this chapter includes : roleplaying, sexual content (no papapa), light spanking, binghe's M awakening (i swear it's very mild), and a little (very little) blow job at the very end. to sum it up, it's their messy first time! no angst, just.. two confused adults figuring things out, yay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Why are you still using my phone?”

“My bookmarks are here,” said Luo Binghe, not even looking up from the screen.

“You can just simply log in, you know,” Shen Yuan said as he reached for his lover’s new phone. “I’ll show you how.”

But the phone got snatched away from his hand!

“I know,” the disciple said, putting his phone out of his lover’s reach. “I simply don’t want to disgrace my phone like that.”

Shen Yuan gasped. “And you can disgrace mine?”

At this, Luo Binghe stopped reading. He pressed the back button then scrolled down the bookmarks list to the very end.

“It was already disgraced,” he said, looking up at his lover as he showed him the phone screen.

Shen Yuan didn’t even know what to say. How was he supposed to defend himself against.. against.. *that?* Luo Binghe!! That one was too strong!!

The disciple snorted. “Tentacles, really?”

It took a while for Shen Yuan to recover. But when he finally did, Luo Binghe was already back reading like nothing happened.

Oh, how Shen Yuan wished he could throw a physical copy of PIDW to his lover’s face.

They got back to their usual daily routines after the whole family left, with a few things added: Luo Binghe now talked to Mama almost everyday, she seemed to like him a lot! Shen

Zhengfei would occasionally send him pictures of the dishes he made, then Luo Binghe would ask Shen Yuan to help him type down compliments for his apprentice. Shen Yanxue, too, would ask for her warm gege whenever she called her Shushu! He seemed to be very popular.

They went on many dates. Not just the mall, but to places even further. Luo Binghe was no longer scared to wander.

On lazy days like this though, they chose to stay at home and read.

The disciple no longer hid what he was reading. He used to only read fluff when they were together, saving the sexy parts for himself to read later.

But now he would just casually scroll down those smut parts! Even when his lover was reading too beside him!

Luo Binghe was *very* into office romance, Shen Yuan noticed. He lost count on how many secretary x CEO he had read, in which most included sexy hot times either against the glass window or over the table.

If Luo Binghe was actually trying to hint on something, nobody—*especially* Shen Yuan would notice.

When Shen Yuan focused back on the screen, he was greeted by another office smut. Bent over the table this time.

And like always, Shen Yuan would open the discussion; "That's very unrealistic."

Luo Binghe would usually let him blabber on as he continued reading. But this time he chose to add a little narration. Saying, "Said someone who reads tentacle sex."

Now that.. That was..

Shen Yuan gaped.

"Now that's kink-shaming," he finally said. Luo Binghe only hummed in response.

"It's fantasy! Anything could happen," he tried to defend himself. Then he tapped on the screen. "This though! How is this acceptable? People don't just get bent over the table in the CEO's office! If a disciplinary action is needed, a warning letter would be enough! And the CEO wouldn't be the one handling that."

Luo Binghe paid no mind. Saying, "It's fiction."

Shen Yuan could really talk for hours, but hey! He had learned his lesson.

He took his phone from his lover's hands. And instead of writing lengthy comments to the author, he locked his phone screen. "Go make a cup of coffee," he said before Luo Binghe could protest. "I'll wait for you in my study room."

“You don’t drink coffee,” the disciple stated.

Shen Yuan looked determined though. “Go,” he said, pushing Luo Binghe off their bed.

And of course Luo Binghe complied.

Luo Binghe was totally *not* prepared for this.

The sight that greeted him once he opened the door to his lover’s study seemed to come straight out of his fantasy.

“I..” He couldn’t even move his feet! And poor cup suffered from his horny grip, the coffee almost spilled!

“Bring that over,” Shen Yuan said. He didn’t even look up as he loosened his tie with one hand, other hand busy writing something down on a piece of paper.

Luo Binghe didn’t move.

It was his first time seeing his lover in a suit and it did things to his heart. Have some mercy!

Shen Yuan stopped writing. He looked up then. “Binghe?” he called, making the disciple flinch. “Are you not coming in?”

Luo Binghe still didn’t move!

“Come in,” Shen Yuan said. “I’ll show you why it’s not realistic.”

The disciple gripped the cup with both hands, pushing the door closed with his back before walking cautiously toward the table. He stopped right in front of it.

Unlike the one in their room, this table was much bigger! Sturdier! It looked very much like the one he imagined when he read those novels. His lover’s chair too!

“I’ll be the rich and young CEO. This would be the exclusive only one-copy document.” Shen Yuan lifted the paper he wrote on before, putting it back on the table before gesturing at the disciple. “You’ll be the clumsy secretary. Come, ruin this very important document with that coffee.”

Shen Yuan was tapping on the paper while Luo Binghe gaped at him.

“I…” Luo Binghe tried to speak. He was still very much gaping at his lover before he slowly turned to look down at his own outfit. He frowned then. “Secretary? Dressed like this?”

He was only in his oversized hoodie and boxershorts!

“You’re gonna strip anyway.”

Poor cup. Tighter horny grip!!

How could his lover say that so casually?! They had never even seen each other naked before!

Sure, yes. Luo Binghe might have.. popped a boner or two during some of their.. heated make out sessions. And he might have felt Shen Yuan's erection too brushing against his thigh. But they had never acted on it! Luo Binghe didn't even dare to touch himself! Cold showers would usually help. All those readings were only for reference *if* one day they would *finally* act on it.

Luo Binghe had thought that by letting Shen Yuan read along with him, he'd get the hint! But he *always* ended up complaining about the plot. He had thought that maybe.. there was no hope after all. He was ready to give up!

But for Shen Yuan to say something like that..

Did he even realize what he was implying?!

Luo Binghe suddenly felt a little dizzy.

"How are you going to spill the coffee?" Shen Yuan asked, tilting his head as he looked up.

Luo Binghe couldn't think!

How did those novel protagonists even spill their coffee?! He had read plenty of these scenes, yet he couldn't come up with any!

Shen Yuan's face looked smug. "See? That's already not realistic," he said, taking the cup of coffee from his lover. Holding it up a little bit to prove his point. Saying, "You don't just simply fall and spill this all over important documents."

"But let's say you've spilled this, and now my document is ruined." Shen Yuan put the cup down before crumpling up the paper, throwing it away. "Now this rich and very handsome CEO of yours is furious. The door is unlocked. Your co-workers might walk in on you. Would you strip if I told you to?"

Now that he put it that way.. Luo Binghe suddenly felt *very* self-conscious. He tugged on the hem of his hoodie, trying to cover up more skin. He shook his head then. Voice barely a whisper as he spoke, "No."

Shen Yuan seemed to already expect that answer. He looked even more smug!

"Right," he agreed. "That's how it should be. You should say no."

Luo Binghe had nothing to say! He could only nod.

And when his lover gestured for him to come closer, he complied.

Shen Yuan stood up as his lover circled the table to approach him.

“Let’s say you’ve stripped.” He wrapped his fingers around the disciple’s wrist, guiding him to turn around. “Down,” he whispered, placing a kiss on the back of his head before pushing him to bend over the table. “Give me your other hand.”

Luo Binghe obviously complied, letting out a shuddering breath as his lover held his wrists behind his back. The grip wasn’t strong, he could break free if he wanted to. But he couldn’t move!

His mind was a jumbled mess, he didn’t know how to move his limbs.

Shen Yuan was leaning his weight on him, breath ghosting over the tip of his ear as he whispered, “I can’t take my tie off with one hand while holding you like this.” He didn’t even try! But Luo Binghe kind of got his points. Now that they brought the scene to life.. It did feel a little unrealistic.

“The plot could be better,” Shen Yuan grunted, letting go of the disciple’s wrists. “This just doesn’t make sense. Too rushed.” He then straightened up with a little groan, hand immediately going to pat his own back. “Not to mention the uncomfortable position!”

Shen Yuan was doing a little stretching when he noticed his lover still hadn’t moved.

“What are you doing? I’m done demonstrating,” he said, trying to pull his lover up. But Luo Binghe didn’t budge! “Binghe?”

No answer! Now Shen Yuan was getting worried! Was he being too much?

“Binghe,” he tried calling again, giving the disciple’s hand a gentle squeeze. “Won’t you get up?”

At the weak whimper he received, Shen Yuan’s heart dropped. Did he accidentally hurt him?! Binghe, turn around! Your lover needed to see!

“Binghe.” He tried to pull him up, this time slipping his hand under his lover’s tummy. But Luo Binghe still didn’t budge! It was as if he got glued to the table! And he whimpered even more!

Shen Yuan mentally cursed himself. “I’m sorry.” He leaned in to place a kiss on his shoulder, asking, “Did I hurt you? I’m sorry.” He tried to pull him up again, but Luo Binghe tried his best to stay. Afraid of hurting him even more, Shen Yuan tried to pull his hand from underneath his lover.

Luo Binghe thought that his lover was going to try to pull him up once more. The thrust of his hips wasn’t intentional! He was just simply trying to stay on the table! He couldn’t face his lover, not like this! But who knew Shen Yuan was trying to free his hand?! And who knew that it’d meet his.. his.. his.. *that?!* Luo Binghe was petrified!

And Shen Yuan’s sudden sharp intake of breath definitely did *not* help!

He knew!!!! Luo Binghe wished the table could just swallow him whole. But it couldn’t!!

Luo Binghe was so ashamed, he started sobbing.

Shen Yuan's head was still trying to process.

...his lover was getting off on this?!

"I'm sorry.." Luo Binghe sobbed, face still pressed against the table.

"Why are you sorry!" Shen Yuan moved his hand back up to his lover's tummy, thumb gently caressing to soothe him. "It's okay.. It's okay. Can you turn around for me?"

Luo Binghe shook his head. Still crying.

Shen Yuan thought that this thing happening right here definitely surpassed all those *unrealistic plots* he'd been trying to prove. But he had.. unleashed something in Luo Binghe! He would *not* make his lover question himself.

"Binghe, it's okay. It's normal to feel that way." He leaned in to kiss the back of his lover's head. Asking, "Do you want me to continue?"

Luo Binghe stopped sobbing.

The disciple was still sniffling when he finally let his lover turn him around. His legs hurt! His back felt uncomfortable against the table! But his eyes were full of hope when he asked, "It's normal? I'm not weird?"

Shen Yuan's face softened. Nodding as he leaned in to peck his lover's lips. "You're not," he said as he pulled away. "Do you want me to go on with the punishment?"

Luo Binghe nodded before he could even think of an answer. He swore his head moved on its own!

"Okay." Shen Yuan brushed his lover's hair away from his face. "We're going to need a safeword."

Luo Binghe once again nodded. He knew what that meant! Shen Yuan knew that his lover understood too. With the amount of BDSM novels on his reading list..

"What's your safeword?" He asked.

"Brulee," the disciple answered.

Shen Yuan frowned. "That's too hard."

"Kung pao."

He was just saying anything that came up in his mind. Why did he think of foods in time like this? Luo Binghe couldn't even understand himself.

“Oh, we had that for dinner,” Shen Yuan muttered. Luo Binghe nodded, eyes still brimming with tears. And Shen Yuan couldn’t help but laugh!

“Kung pao,” the disciple croaked out.

"Are you really going to bring food into this?” He cupped his lover’s cheek, laughing even more when Luo Binghe answered him with a firm nod. He turned serious again when he asked, “So what do you say when you want me to stop?”

Luo Binghe reached to wrap his fingers around his lover’s wrist, leaning into his touch as he answered, “Kung pao.”

Shen Yuan seemed to hesitate, but Luo Binghe gave his wrist a little squeeze. Assuring him. And what else was he supposed to do?! Of course he’d give his lover what he needed. And if it got him a little excited too down there, he chose not to say a word.

He helped his lover to turn back around, gathering his wrists into his hand. Asking, “Do you want me to tie you up?” It was like that in the novel.

Luo Binghe shook his head though. “I like your fingers on me,” he said, making Shen Yuan tighten his hold.

“Is this okay? Not too tight?”

“Mm.” Luo Binghe hummed in content.

“What’s your chicken?” Shen Yuan asked, just to make sure.

“Teriyaki,” the disciple answered.

Going around the globe now, are we? All of these felt too unreal, Shen Yuan couldn’t help but laugh. Binghe!! Stop thinking about foods for once!!

He still asked though, “Not kung pao?”

“No, please go on.”

“Okay.”

Shen Yuan had no experience in this, but he had read *so* many spanking scenes in the last few days! He learned enough! Luo Binghe seemed to be sure of what he wanted too.

The moment his lover’s palm met his butt, Luo Binghe pushed himself back against his touch.

“Okay?” Shen Yuan asked, caressing his lover as he waited for his answer. “Not too hard?”

“Harder,” the disciple whined.

Wasn't this supposed to be a punishment?! Shen Yuan was out of words! He still gave it to him though. Feeling his cock twitch at his lover's moan. *Oh.* Had he been enjoying this too all along?!

Shen Yuan was too shocked at the realization, his hand moved on its own. Eager to prove.

His eyes widened then.

He only stopped when the disciple screamed for his Shizun.

"Kung pao!" Shen Yuan said right away.

That seemed to catch the disciple off guard. He was panting when he turned around, his lover immediately helped him to stand up. "Why are you using my safeword?" he asked, holding on to his lover to steady himself.

"No Shizun in bed," said Shen Yuan.

Luo Binghe blinked. "We're on the table?"

...yeah, doing bed matters! Shen Yuan didn't say that out loud though. He said instead, "Don't call me that."

"Okay, gege," Luo Binghe said, already wriggling out of his lover's arms. He went back to bend himself over the table. "Start again?"

Shen Yuan thought that this person right here would be the death of him.

He let out a sigh in defeat, already preparing himself to go on with the smacks. But before he could even lift his hand, Luo Binghe was already turning back around!

"No, wait. Kung pao," he said as he tried to stand up.

Shen Yuan reached out to help him. "I haven't even started?"

"My back hurts," the disciple said, massaging his back. Shen Yuan unconsciously helped.

"I told you the position is uncomfortable," Shen Yuan said.

Luo Binghe pouted, though he didn't say anything to argue.

"Let's try something else?" Shen Yuan offered.

Seeing the way his lover's face brightened up at this, Shen Yuan chuckled. "Does it hurt? Can you sit?"

Luo Binghe shook his head and nodded at the questions. He pushed himself up when his lover tried to lift him up, making him sit on the table. Then Shen Yuan pulled the chair closer. Sitting down in the space between his lover's legs.

He rested his palm on the disciple's bare thigh, softly caressing it as he looked up to ask, "Is this okay?"

Luo Binghe had his lips a little parted. He nodded.

But seemed like it wasn't enough! Because Shen Yuan asked, "What's your chicken?"

Luo Binghe mentioned a famous chicken brand. He yelped when his lover dived in! So bold!! But turned out he was aiming for his tummy?!

"Aren't you hungry!" Shen Yuan exclaimed, laughter a little muffled as he nuzzled against the disciple's tummy.

"Gege, your face is inches away from my dick," Luo Binghe said, sighing as he reached to stroke his lover's hair. "Do I look hungry?"

Shen Yuan looked up at his lover, putting his arms around his waist. "You keep mentioning chicken," he said.

"You keep asking," the disciple answered. He was feeling so.. many things. He cradled his lover's head in his arms when he buried his face back on the soft fabric of his hoodie, fingers threading through his hair. "You're buying time, aren't you? Should we stop?"

Shen Yuan whined softly. He shook his head, pulling Luo Binghe even closer to him. "Just.. give me a moment," he said, trying to calm his heart. Voice barely a whisper as he spoke, "I want this too.."

Luo Binghe didn't know what to say. So he just kept.. stroking his hair. It took a while for him to finally brace himself to ask, "What do you want?"

"I want to suck your dick," Shen Yuan mumbled. Nuzzling his lover's tummy even more, it tickled.

The disciple let out a breathy chuckle, trying to stop him as he asked, "What's stopping you?"

Please, please! He could feel his cock leaking even now!

At his lover's question, Shen Yuan pulled away. He took Luo Binghe's hand in his and brought it close to his heart, placing his palm against his chest. Luo Binghe's eyes widened at what he felt.

"Relax!" he shrieked, hand immediately moving to caress his chest.

"I'm trying to!"

"Breathe, breathe." Luo Binghe took a deep breath in and breathed out, making sure the sound was loud enough for Shen Yuan to follow. Patting his chest as he said, "It's okay, we can take our time."

Shen Yuan nodded. He did read.. a lot. But that didn't change the fact that he was inexperienced in this. He didn't even know he liked guys before Binghe!

It took a while for him to finally calm down. And when he finally *finally* had his fingers wrapped around his lover's length, he looked up to ask, "What's your-"

"Rendang," Luo Binghe cut him off, bucking up into his hand.

"That's beef," Shen Yuan said, taking the tip into his mouth only to pull away seconds after. Saying, "I don't think I can eat chicken for a while."

Luo Binghe's lips were parted in soft gasps, hands clutching on his lover's hair. "I won't.. cook any."

Shen Yuan could feel his ears getting *very* warm. Did he just speak his thoughts out loud?! Looking at his lover's face though, he knew he had no time to be embarrassed. He'd been treating him really well, he wanted to please him!

At that, his cock seemed to agree.

Chapter End Notes

no chickens were harmed

Chapter 21: wives-free zone

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This was out of plan.

Shen Yuan did *not* cling on his lover to provoke his brother.

Well, maybe he did. But this wasn't the outcome he was expecting!

It would have been great if his effort had sparked his brother's anger. His hope was high that maybe his brother would *finally* stop! Video calling! Luo Binghe! For cooking lessons! And stop! Stealing him! From their morning cuddles!

Who knew that he'd do the exact opposite?

Their morning cooking lessons had turned into a whole.. match of showing off.

Shen Yuan had now turned into an accessory!

"You know what," he muttered, letting go of Luo Binghe. "I'm not doing this anymore."

A single whine from the disciple was enough to make Shen Yuan cling back to him!

"Your lover is so weak," Shen Zhengfei said. *"Mine could hold me all day and she won't get tired!"*

Shen Yuan would very much like to punch his brother's face on the phone screen.

"Gege is not weak," Luo Binge tried to protest, looking fierce even in his cucumber apron. Saying, "He's not tired! He's definitely not tired of holding me." Then he hesitated. "...right?"

Shen Yuan knew that tone. He sighed, patting his lover's tummy as he affirmed, "Right." He held him closer then. Face flush against his back. "Not tired of holding you. How do I get tired of holding you? I want to hold you so much, I wish we could go back to bed."

Shen Yuan no longer had shame. Not in front of his brother, at least.

Luo Binghe was about to turn off the stove when Shen Zhengfei exclaimed, *"Ha! He only wants you in bed!"*

That earned him a smack from his wife. He laughed though, while Luo Binghe's expression had turned grim.

"I want you everywhere!" Shen Yuan squeezed his lover in his arms, almost wanting to scream out of frustration. "Don't listen to him."

Luo Binghe looked torn. His voice was small when he spoke, “But you said I could trust your family..”

Shen Yuan pointed at the phone screen. Saying, “Not his every word!”

“Binghe, how much sugar do I add?” Shen Zhengfei asked, looking very much unbothered.

“You’re so bitter you might as well pour them all,” Shen Yuan barked. Though his voice was soft when he spoke to his lover, “We should just get back to bed.” Adding not long after, “Doesn’t mean I only want you in bed! I want you in the bathroom, in the kitchen, in.. everywhere! But this is just ridiculous and he keeps speaking nonsense.”

Noticing the urgency in his brother’s voice, Shen Zhengfei was surprised! Asking, *“He actually believes my words?”*

And before the couple could answer, he said, *“You know, my Didi used to have so many wives! He would get ma-”*

Shen Yuan ended the call.

Luo Binghe was in a daze. He froze, trying to process the older Shen’s words.

Shen Yuan let go of his lover to take his apron off and turn off the stove. “I’m blocking his number on your phone,” he said.

He was about to reach for his lover’s phone when Luo Binghe stopped him. Asking, “You had.. wives?”

“In online games.” Shen Yuan sighed. “For mission purposes only.”

Luo Binghe’s grip on his lover’s wrist tightened. “Not only a wife but.. wives?”

“They’re not even real wives. I’ve never seen them, never met them,” Shen Yuan said, putting his hand on top of his lover. “Only to complete game quests. They were nothing like you, not even close.”

The words seemed to soothe him a bit. He still asked though, “How about now?”

“None,” Shen Yuan answered in a heartbeat.

Luo Binghe looked relieved for a while only to frown. “None?” That meant he wasn’t counted!

Shen Yuan seemed to notice his lover’s concern. He asked, “Are you my wife?”

The disciple hesitated before finally shaking his head. He looked *very* disappointed!

“Exactly.” Shen Yuan reached to pinch his cheek. Chuckling lightly before he spoke, “And if we do get married, it’ll be husband, you silly.”

The words came out so easily, he even surprised himself. But Luo Binghe was even more surprised!

His lover was blushing so hard, Shen Yuan couldn't help but laugh. He pulled him closer then. Standing on his tiptoes to place a kiss on Luo Binghe's forehead. "Don't worry too much," he said. "I have no secret wives."

Luo Binghe nodded, pulling his lover into his arms. "Okay," he muttered.

Shen Yuan managed to drag his lover back to their room. Though when he jumped onto their bed, Luo Binghe was still lingering at the doorstep.

Shen Yuan waited with his arms spread open, but Luo Binghe wasn't coming!

The disciple bit his lower lip, hesitating as he asked, "Is it okay to share a bed?"

Shen Yuan was obviously taken aback.

Even more when Luo Binghe shyly said, "We're not married yet.."

"You want me to sleep on the floor?" Shen Yuan asked.

It wasn't the answer Luo Binghe was expecting!

He was pouting when he climbed onto the bed, yanking his lover by the neck as he was about to roll off to the floor. "You have no common sense," he mumbled, bundling up a very confused Shen Yuan in a blanket.

"But I offered myself to sleep on the floor?"

"Exactly."

"I don't under-"

"Shush."

They ended up sleeping together anyway.

Blocking his brother's number, it seemed, wasn't enough to shoo him off.

It was the first thing Shen Yuan did when his lover's phone vibrated. But turned out he was too late! Shen Zhengfei seemed to be here already! Because Shen Yanxue was here in their room!

Shen Yuan was still all bundled up in his blanket when his niece crawled up to him. "Is Shushu very cold?" she asked, looking concerned.

"Yes. He's *very* cold." Luo Binghe firmly nodded. He seemed to be sulking but Shen Yuan didn't know what he did wrong!

Shen Yanxue immediately wrapped her arms around her Shushu's neck. "Why are you not warming him up?"

Right. Now that she asked about it, why was Luo Binghe not holding him to sleep this time?! He looked at the disciple with a frown, waiting for his answer as well.

With two pairs of eyes looking at him like this, Luo Binghe was weak! He gave up and snuggled close to his lover, pulling the little girl along into his arms.

Shen Yanxue giggled as she clung even more to her Shushu. Asking, "Are you warm now?"

"Yes, thank you." Shen Yuan nuzzled her hair as he scooted even closer to his lover. "Is your Baba downstairs?"

Shen Yanxue perked up at the question. She wriggled herself free as she exclaimed, "He left! On a date with Mama!"

And just like that, Shen Yuan was assigned to babysit.

Though as the day went on, his niece was literally glued to Luo Binghe. Unfair, he wanted to scream! But the sight was so adorable, he couldn't help smiling.

They went to the mall, with Shen Yanxue insisting to try as many sweets she could find. Luo Binghe obviously complied. Shen Yuan felt full even just by watching them eat!

"Your Ma is going to scold me for this." Shen Yuan sighed as he wiped the cookie crumbs off his niece's cheek.

She shoved the cookie into his mouth. Chirping, "Then don't tell her!"

And Luo Binghe had the audacity to laugh. He helped take the cookie out from his mouth though, knowing his lover couldn't finish it in one bite. It was huge. He asked, "What are we ordering next?"

Shen Yuan gave him a warning glare. Luo Binghe cleared his throat then. Asking, "Should we go to the arcade?"

Knowing it wouldn't work on her Shushu, Shen Yanxue pouted at Luo Binghe. "What about my ice cream?"

"You didn't even finish your cake." Shen Yuan sighed.

Shen Yanxue didn't even bat him a glance. Still looking at Luo Binghe as she spoke, "Gege, ice cream."

And who was Luo Binghe to deny her!

He ended up finishing her cake *and* her ice cream because she apparently only wanted a few tiny spoons of it.

“You’re spoiling her too much,” Shen Yuan muttered as they watched her play the fishing game.

“You’re the one paying,” Luo Binghe whispered as he leaned closer. “You could’ve stopped me.”

It was true. Shen Yuan couldn’t come up with an answer.

When they were finally back in their car, Luo Binghe whined: “I ate too much.”

Shen Yanxue was fast asleep on her pink car seat, tired from all the playing.

“You did,” Shen Yuan agreed, reaching out to pat his lover’s tummy. Offering, “You can unbutton your jeans, if you want.”

Luo Binghe choked on air. Immediately glancing at the backseat before turning to look at his lover. Voice a little hushed as he said, “Control yourself! We have a child in the car!”

Shen Yuan was a little slow. But when he finally *got* what he meant, he pinched his lover’s tummy! “I think we should get your brain washed,” he said, placing his hand back on the steering wheel. “You can unbutton your jeans to give more space for your tummy. Stop thinking dirty.”

“Oh.” Luo Binghe blushed, immediately sighing out in relief as his jeans were unbuttoned. “That’s better.”

His hand absentmindedly rubbed his tummy, seeming fascinated as he spoke, “I didn’t know it could hurt from eating too much..”

“Hm?”

“I used to wonder what it’s like to have plenty of food available. It must’ve been nice to eat freely without having to leave some for tomorrow. Or for the next days,” Luo Binghe mumbled to himself. “I know it could hurt when I don’t have enough. But it could hurt too from having too much?”

One look at his lover was all that it took for Shen Yuan to decide, “I need to go somewhere.”

“Where are we going?” Luo Binghe asked, looking up at him.

“Not us. Just me,” said Shen Yuan. “There’s someone I need to see.”

At this, Luo Binghe frowned. “You said you have no secret wives..”

“I don’t. But he could give you plenty wives.” Shen Yuan frowned as well. Seeming determined as he spoke, “I’d like to make it clear that he can’t take you away from me. I won’t let him.”

Luo Binghe didn’t understand. He had no plan to find a wife! He surely wouldn’t be interested in leaving his lover for.. some wives. Nobody could take him away from Shen

Yuan!

But he liked it. He liked the way his lover gripped on the steering wheel a little too hard; as if the idea of Luo Binghe leaving upset him. As if he'd do anything to keep him there. With him.

Luo Binghe would like to be kept.

He nodded then. "Okay," he said. "You can go meet him. Tell him I'm not going anywhere and I'm not interested in marrying any wives."

And before Shen Yuan could speak, he added, "I'll wait at home."

Chapter End Notes

are we finally meeting airplane. aRe wEE,,,

Chapter 22: buried dreams

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The plan was to barge into his house, tell him he'd like to keep his son, put the whole transmigration thing all behind and to go on their separate ways.

It'd be good for Luo Binghe, he thought.

It'd be good to just live in the present moment and not to dwell on things that couldn't be undone.

It was why he hadn't tried contacting Airplane Bro despite having his number and address all saved in his phone. Luo Binghe had found a home; and his willingness to contact his old friend was reduced to none.

He was afraid he'd take him away. He was afraid Luo Binghe wouldn't stay.

Couldn't stay.

What if Airplane Bro found a way to bring the disciple back into the novel? Shen Yuan couldn't let that happen. Not when Luo Binghe was safe and sound, all sheltered and warm back in their home.

But when he reached his doorstep…

Shen Yuan wasn't sure anymore.

Had Airplane Bro been living like this all along?

Where did all the money go? Where did all *his* money go? All those 6666 chapters of PIDW! Readers from all over the nation! Yet he couldn't afford a better place?

Shen Yuan was mad at capitalism.

And somehow *somehow,* he understood why his old friend had chosen that path. From a potentially good cultivation novel to.. a.. whole messy world of unnecessary papapa. It surely gained him more readers. More money.

But for him to live in this state.. was it still not enough?

Shen Yuan frowned.

He couldn't even bring himself to knock on the door.

Shen Yuan had found it a bit weird at first. The address he had was of a high-rise apartment, but the note said basement. Do apartments have resident rooms in their basement? Shen Yuan

had no idea.

When he asked the receptionist about it, she couldn't even utter a word!

He knew she recognized him though. How could she not, when his face had been displayed all over the news?! Hottest dating scandal of the year. The talk of the nation, ST Group's third son! And his gorgeous, gorgeous knife fairy!

Taking this to his advantage, he asked again.

She hesitated, but this time Shen Yuan got his answer.

She had addressed him properly with his last name, telling him that the security would lead him there.

Shen Yuan was then led outside, with the ever-frowning security who kept checking on his outfit. "Are you sure that's where your friend lives, Sir?" He kept asking. And Shen Yuan nodded. Because the note said so.

They went through a different entrance, kind of shady and not visible to other visitors. Shen Yuan's thoughts as they went down the stairs were: it was damp. It was cold. Not even the slightest bit of sun rays could come, and Shen Yuan would very much like to go home.

He was shocked to find that there were.. indeed.. rooms.

Underneath all the glory the building displayed, there were rooms.

And he was standing right in front of Airplane Bro's.

The security had excused himself for quite a while now, but Shen Yuan still hadn't found the courage to knock.

Was it a trap? Was it a joke?

Airplane Bro *couldn't* really be living in a place like this.

Or could he…?

Knowing that there was only one way to find out, he knocked.

And the sight that greeted him…

He could see the whole room when the door was opened.

"You…" the person started. He was a tad bit taller than him. He looked like he hadn't slept for days, bags underneath his eyes were visible though Shen Yuan could see that his bed was unmade.

And as much as Shen Yuan would like to not believe it, he knew it was *him* when the person asked, "Cucumber bro?"

Shen Yuan couldn't find his voice. He nodded.

"So it was real," the person—Airplane Bro said, voice barely a whisper as he held up his hand. Covering his face as he let out a shuddering breath. "I thought I was crazy.."

His voice shook. And so was his body.

And when the crying man threw himself into his arms, Shen Yuan caught him.

His name was Shang Qinghua.

Yes. The novel's Shang Qinghua was a self-insert.

His parents believed that a good name would bring good luck.

He went to the city to live up to his name; managed to get into the top university before realizing that it was *never* his dream to begin with.

He then dropped out of university, left his dorm, and had been living here ever since.

It was a small room, but he was happy. He worked in a nearby internet cafe where he wrote all those chapters he updated daily. The money he earned from the job was used for his expenses, while the one he got from writing was sent to his family.

It was the least he could do. They spent a fortune getting him here, he said.

And he got to do the things he had always loved: writing.

At first, things were great. But as the numbers started dropping, he knew he had to do something.

A good story is good, but a story that *sells* is much better.

Shang Qinghua then started to write what people wanted to read.

He no longer wrote things that he wanted to write; he lost himself.

And his dreams turned into just mere dreams.

He was working the day he got transmigrated. When he got thrown back into this world, it was still the same day. He woke up to a customer shouting for cup ramen.

He avoided the site then. Taking a break from all things related to the novel.

"It was not even an hour for me," Shang Qinghua croaked out. "It all felt too real to be a dream. I tried not to think about it. But then.. the video.. I just.. I needed.. I.."

He turned to look at Shen Yuan. His eyes were still red from crying and Shen Yuan hated himself for assuming.

Shang Qinghua had no plans to take Luo Binghe away.

He just needed an assurance that it was real.

That it was not just a dream.

“It’s not a dream,” Shen Yuan confirmed, wiping the tears off his friend’s cheek with the back of his hand. “You’re not crazy. Well. If you are, then I am too.”

Shang Qinghua seemed to wheeze rather than laugh. But he was smiling. And Shen Yuan smiled back at him.

They spent a while looking at each other. Both looked foreign to each other, but it felt like they’ve always been together.

It was Shang Qinghua who broke the silence, “He’s with you then?”

Shen Yuan nodded. “He’s with me,” he said, stretching his legs only to pull them back and hold them close to his chest. The room was too small. Too small. His mouth then moved on its own, “Do you want to meet him?”

Shang Qinghua looked genuinely surprised. “You’ll let me?”

“He’s your son.” Shen Yuan nudged his friend. “You’ve loved him long before I do.”

Now Shang Qinghua looked even *more* surprised!

“You.. I.. *what?”* He stuttered, gesturing wildly with his hands as he tried to process the words. “You love…”

Shen Yuan jumped up before he could even finish his words. “Come on,” he said, pulling his friend along with him. “Don’t you miss your son? Get up.”

And just like that, he dragged him home. Plans all forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

bros reunited

Chapter 23: I'm a grandfather?!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Does he know that I'm coming?"

"He doesn't," said Shen Yuan, closing the door to his empty bedroom. "He's probably in the kitchen."

Shang Qinghua frowned. "At this hour?"

It was late when they arrived, Shen Yuan had even said that it was past the disciple's bedtime. That he would probably be asleep.

But Luo Binghe wasn't in his room!

Shang Qinghua's fascination with his friend's mansion was replaced by concern as they walked down the stairs.

Did his friend lie?! Did he make his son work?! At this hour?! Not even giving him time to rest?! Unacceptable!

Not to mention that his son also did the laundry! He hand-washed them! It was like that in the viral video of Luo Binghe that he watched!

Shang Qinghua was about to protest when his friend called a maid over to ask where Luo Binghe was.

"Young Master Shen," the maid greeted. Bowing her head slightly as she answered, "I believe he's still in the living room with Xiao Yan."

"She's still here?"

"Yes. She refused to go home." The maid nodded, a fond smile making its way to her face as she tilted her head. "They're pretty much glued to each other."

At this, Shen Yuan laughed. He thanked the maid and walked away, leaving a *very* enraged Shang Qinghua behind.

Ha! Young Master! What kind of Young Master couldn't afford a washing machine?! This was outrageous! He took the protagonist away from his world just to make him do house chores! And who the fuck was that even! His son doesn't just *stick* to anyone! Not even his wives!

Shang Qinghua was literally fuming as he followed his friend. No, scratch that. He would no longer be his friend if Luo Binghe was not treated right! He would take his son away from this cruel, cruel man!!

Though when he saw his son.. asleep on the couch… with a little girl soundly asleep too on his chest… Shang Qinghua didn't know what to make of the sight.

He turned his gaze to Shen Yuan only to find his friend crouching down to give his son a kiss! On the forehead!

Luo Binghe stirred in his sleep. And when he opened his eyes to see who woke him up, his lips were immediately puckered up. And Shen Yuan! Kissed! Him! Without a thought!

Shang Qinghua gaped.

This looked like a scene of a husband coming home to find his family waiting for him! Very domestic! Very.. *what?!*

Is his son the wife?!!!!!

"Move to the bed," Shen Yuan said as he took the little girl into his arms, giving Luo Binghe another peck before straightening up. "You'll hurt your back sleeping like that."

"Was waiting.." Luo Binghe mumbled, rubbing the sleep away from his eyes as he sat up. "Zhengfei Ge picked her up but she doesn't want to go. He was sulking real bad, you might not want to check your phone."

Shen Yuan was holding the girl in one arm, chuckling as he reached out to pat the disciple's head. "I blocked him," he said. Luo Binghe laughed.

It was…

Shang Qinghua felt like he was invading a private moment.

His son does not.. laugh. Not like that.

He might've let out a sound because his son turned to look at him! Shang Qinghua froze.

Luo Binghe then looked up at Shen Yuan. "Who…?"

"My friend," Shen Yuan answered, fixing the little girl's position in his arms as she nuzzled against his shoulder. "He's staying for the night. Could you show him the guest room?"

Shang Qinghua never agreed on that! He was just here to see his son! Not to stay! Though when his son smiled at him, he couldn't bring himself to utter a word.

It looked good.. on him. The smile. It wasn't fake. It wasn't forced. Shang Qinghua *knew.*

Not even his wives had the privilege of seeing.. that. And Shang Qinghua got it just by being Shen Yuan's friend?!

Bro! The power you hold!

Shang Qinghua didn't have to look up much when his son approached him. The height difference was no longer that high.

He still trembled though. Luo Binghe halted.

The disciple turned to look at his Shizun as if asking what's wrong.

"Lao Shang is just shy," Shen Yuan said. "He's a fan."

Luo Binghe blushed!!

HIS SON BLUSHED!!

"I'm no longer on the trending list," Luo Binghe mumbled. His smile was shy when he turned to look back at him. "But thank you for the support."

Shang Qinghua was so out of it he could only gape.

"Would you like a sign..?" Luo Binghe ended up asking.

?!!!

At the lack of response, Shen Yuan offered, "Maybe he'd like a picture."

Luo Binghe was already fixing his hair! Asking, "Would gege take it for us then?"

Gege?!!!

Before Shang Qinghua could even say anything, Shen Yuan already had his phone camera aimed at them. Luo Binghe was smiling. Shen Yuan was counting. Shang Qinghua was in a daze. And the picture was taken!

"I'll send it later," said Shen Yuan, having the audacity to wink!!!! "Enjoy your time with your idol."

"Not an idol!" Luo Binghe *whined,* taking a pillow from the couch to throw at Shen Yuan. Though he stopped himself from doing so when the older man immediately shielded the child in his arms.

What kind of conversation was this even! What idol! What fan! Child, I created you!! Shang Qinghua wanted to scream.

"Sorry," Luo Binghe mumbled as they *finally* walked away from Shen Yuan. "People used to come up to me in public saying that they were a fan, and he kept teasing me for that! Now every time someone looked at me for too long, he'd say maybe they'd like a picture with the knife fairy! And most of the time, he was right. I don't even get what's so special about me."

Child!!! You *are* special!!

But since when did you talk this much?!

"I'm a fan," Shang Qinghua said before he could even stop his mouth. He wouldn't want his child to look down on himself! "You're very cool."

Luo Binghe seemed surprised. And Shang Qinghua braced himself to ask, "Do you give signatures to people?"

"Only if they asked," Luo Binghe said, voice sounding small. "Gege said famous people give that to their fans. I practiced a little."

"Gege?" asked Shang Qinghua. Guessing, "Your Shizun?"

Luo Binghe stopped walking.

His expression was quite hard to read when he looked at Shang Qinghua.

Shang Qinghua, too, froze under his gaze. Stupid mouth!!! He was supposed to *not* know that one!!

Luo Binghe's tone was careful when he asked, "Do I know you?"

Again, his mouth moved on its own: "I'm your Shizun's friend." Lucky it wasn't *I'm your God* or something worse!

But Shang Qinghua really needed to shut up.

"Lao Shang.." Luo Binghe tilted his head, recalling the way his Shizun had addressed this man. He straightened up then. Eyes growing wide as he asked, "Shang Shishu?"

And before Shang Qinghua could answer, Luo Binghe was already bowing in respect!

"Forgive this one for assuming that Shishu is a fan," said Luo Binghe. "This one should've realized ge–Shizun was only playing around."

Kid. You still respect this man?! Shang Qinghua was touched!

He took it as his chance to ask more questions as they resumed walking.

"Does he treat you well? Do you get enough sleep? Does he make you do house chores? Are you unable to rest from all the work?"

Luo Binghe was surprised! And to think that they weren't that close back at the peak…

"Shizun treats me really well," he answered. "He kept telling me not to do house chores. I am very well-rested, he'd drag me back to bed if I worked too much."

Shang Qinghua frowned. "He drags you around? He bullies you?"

"No!" Luo Binghe immediately shook his head. "There were times he wanted to carry me but he couldn't, so he just.. drag. But it was very full of care! Shizun doesn't bully me. He's also very sticky.. he'd cling and wouldn't let me leave the bed too early."

….?!!!

"You two share a bed?"

Binghe! Luo Binghe!!! Is that a blush creeping up your neck that I'm seeing?! Binghe!! Son!!

Alright. He'd seen the dating rumors. But to have it confirmed.. like this?

Shang Qinghua's mind was a jumbled mess. He asked then, "You're okay.. with the child?"

At this, Luo Binghe seemed to light up. He nodded! Saying, "Yanyan is very sweet."

Son!! You don't even remember all of your own children's names!! But you're fond of one that wasn't even yours?!

Shang Qinghua had to constantly remind himself that this was *not* Bing ge.

But still…

To think that he'd let a child sleep on his chest.. and that he slept too.. Unguarded. Like he believed nothing in this world would harm them..

Bing ge would *never*.

Shang Qinghua would like to ask more, but it seemed that they had reached his room.

And Luo Binghe bid him a good night before he could even ask him the *most* important question.

Are you okay marrying into a house with a child?!

Would that make me a grandpa?!

Binghe, Binghe! Don't go yet!! Binghe!!

Chapter End Notes

Let's play a game.

If shen yuan was confronted, would he....
a) tell airplane bro that the sweet child is his niece
b) bribe his niece to call him baba for a day just to give airplane bro a heart attack
c) doesn't say anything and DOESN'T DENY

Chapter 24: not now

Chapter Notes

> Heads up: i think this one's a little angsty... mentions of binghe's pre-transmigration suicide and past abuse
>
> But hey. Double update for this week!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Don’t bite your pen,” Shen Yuan said, tugging on his lover’s wrist to pull the pen out of his mouth.

Luo Binghe’s smile was shy as he closed the book on his lap. Saying, “I have some.. thoughts.”

They had just finished writing their three good things and to-do list; now finally having time for themselves with Shen Yuan’s sticky niece asleep in his sister’s room.

He took their books and pens, putting them aside on the bedside table before scooting closer to his lover. “Tell me?”

Shen Yuan was not going to say this out loud, but he missed having his lover in his arms. He didn’t get to hold him much today! He’d also like a kiss! But Luo Binghe seemed to be deep in thought.

Shen Yuan held himself back from attacking his lover. Kisses could wait.

The disciple hesitated. But he asked anyway, “Do you think it’s okay to ask Shang Shishu how he got here?” and before his lover could answer, he continued, “Wouldn’t it be the same as asking him how he died?”

Shen Yuan blinked in confusion.

Now that his lover brought that up.. He didn’t know either. Airplane Bro didn’t say anything on *how* he got back here. Did he die too in that world? Would that be why he returned? What happened to that world even?

“If…” Luo Binghe started, making Shen Yuan focus back on him as he took a deep breath.

He opened his mouth to speak, but he couldn’t find the right words to say. It was too grand to wish this way, but…

“If those who died moved here, then..”

Luo Binghe couldn't finish his words. But Shen Yuan knew. He knew.

He reached for his lover's hand, meeting his gaze when those pair of hopeful eyes searched for his own. Watching as the light dimmed from the lack of answer.

The disciple's voice was small when he asked, "She's not here, is she?"

Shen Yuan thought that the chances were very high that no one else beside them got transmigrated here.

Luo Binghe was a special case. He was, after all, the protagonist. If anyone transmigrated along with him to this world, the protagonist himself would be understandable. But for other characters.. Shen Yuan didn't think it'd be the same.

Especially not.. a side character without a name. But he couldn't bring himself to say that.

Instead, he shook his head. Saying, "I don't know.."

Luo Binghe laughed. The sound pierced through Shen Yuan's heart.

"Knew it. It was just some.. wishful thinking," said Luo Binghe, letting himself be pulled into his lover's arms. "We better sleep."

Luo Binghe was smiling as he looked up, assuring his lover that he was fine. Shen Yuan didn't buy that though. He knew how much the woman meant to Luo Binghe. She used to be the only light in his endless dark tunnel.

The white lotus that he knew, this beautiful soul right here in his arms.. learned love from his mother.

Shen Yuan pressed a kiss to his lover's temple. Whispering, "I'm sorry.."

"Why are you sorry!" Luo Binghe squeaked, pulling away to take a better look at his lover. "It's not like I could find her if she's here."

"What if she has a different face too, like you and Shishu? I wouldn't be able to recognize her!" Luo Binghe laughed, waving his hand dismissively as he said, "I don't even know her name."

Shen Yuan was quiet.

Luo Binghe tucked his head under his lover's chin, laughter dying down as he exhaled a shaky breath. Whispering, "I can't come up to strangers calling them mother. It's not like she'd.. recognize me. I mean, if she's here."

"I just wish I could.." Luo Binghe's voice was getting even smaller as he snuggled closer, burying his face on the crook of his lover's neck. "Cook for her. With all these resources, I could've… I.."

Letting his mother go on an empty stomach was Luo Binghe's biggest regret.

Shen Yuan knew. He'd been there with him twice—as a reader and a bystander in his dream realm.

He hated that he couldn't do anything about it. He hated that he was powerless against fate.

He cradled Luo Binghe closer, not saying a word as his lover sniffled.

"I'm sorry," Luo Binghe croaked out, taking his lover's shirt into his fist as he choked back a sob. "It was just.. It's unfair. All she ever showed me was kindness, but I could only watch as her own kindness killed her."

Shen Yuan shook his head. "Don't apologize."

He knew Luo Binghe had never had the time to grieve for his mother. He had to fend for himself right after she left—forced to face the world with no one to return to. No home.

"Maybe if we never met, she could've lived." Luo Binghe sounded broken as he spoke. "She wouldn't have worked too hard. She wouldn't have used all her money for me." He halted. Taking a shaky breath before saying, "She wouldn't have got tricked.."

She wouldn't have existed, Shen Yuan's mind told him.

It was cruel that her death was necessary. It was cruel that her role was quickly dismissed; that it was only part of the bigger plot for the protagonist.

Shen Yuan let the disciple cry to his chest as he held him close.

"Maybe it's a good thing that she isn't here," said Luo Binghe. "If she knew I lost it, it'd kill her twice."

Shen Yuan was immediately reminded.

"You didn't lose it," he said before he could even stop himself. "The pendant. You didn't lose it. I did."

Luo Binghe froze. His eyes were brimming with tears when he looked up at Shen Yuan. Asking, "...you know about the pendant?"

Shen Yuan reached to wipe the tears off his lover's cheek, but Luo Binghe was quick to catch his wrist. "What do you mean I didn't lose it but you did?"

The grip on his wrist was strong, almost hurting. But Shen Yuan made no effort to pull away. He kept his eyes on his lover as he said, "I've been keeping it with me."

Luo Binghe's expression was.. quite hard to read. His voice was also quite hard to hear. It was just movements of his lips. Asking: *why?*

Shen Yuan couldn't come up with an answer.

“I don’t understand. Shijie and I searched all day. But how..?” Luo Binghe was frowning now, gaze unfocused as he tried to recall the memory. Feeling the shiver crept up his back as it dawned upon him, hoping that it wasn’t like what he thought it’d be. “...were you there when it happened? When they…?”

Shen Yuan was still silent. Though his silence was an enough answer.

Luo Binghe didn’t know what to feel.

The room was quiet for long enough, Luo Binghe stated, “You were there.” He searched for his lover’s eyes. Hoping that he’d deny. Hoping that he’d explain.

He got none.

It tugged his heart on all the wrong way, hands slightly shaking with the emotion flooding in. “And you didn’t stop them,” said Luo Binghe, unconsciously clutching on his lover’s wrist a little tighter. His voice sounded broken when he spoke, “You could’ve at least given me the pendant back. But you.. I don’t understand.”

“You could’ve stopped them. You have the power to..”

“Binghe..” Shen Yuan placed his free hand on top of his lover’s.

Luo Binghe pulled away as if the touch burned.

“I’m going to sleep,” said the disciple. Urgency thick in his voice as he pulled on the cover; lying down facing the other way as he shut his eyes. Willing for the feeling to go away.

Luo Binghe didn’t sleep.

Shen Yuan knew. He couldn’t sleep as well.

It’d been hours since they lay down next to each other; Shen Yuan looking up at the ceiling. Luo Binghe facing the wall.

They were close, yet they weren’t touching. The gap between them was close to none, but Luo Binghe felt too far for him to reach.

The disciple’s breaths were shaky when Shen Yuan left the bed.

And right before the door was shut, Shen Yuan could’ve sworn he heard a sob.

He didn’t look back.

He left.

They needed time—both of them.

His feet were bare when he stepped out the main door. It was already open.

Shen Yuan wasn't surprised to find Airplane Bro leaning against the wall, a cigarette between his lips.

"There's a balcony in your room," said Shen Yuan, frowning slightly at the sight.

Shang Qinghua turned to look at him. Looking unamused as he exhaled. Saying, "I know. I was going to leave."

"What's stopping you?" Shen Yuan asked, moving to stand next to his friend. He took the cigarette from his fingers, throwing it to the ground. Then he looked up at Shang Qinghua. As if demanding him to do something.

Shang Qinghua raised an eyebrow at him. But he got the message anyway, stepping on the cigarette. He was the only one wearing shoes after all.

"You have a daughter," Shang Qinghua deadpanned. "You've never told me you were married. Are you someone's husband, still? Is my son a concubine? I really can't leave before making sure of this."

????

Shen Yuan wasn't sure how to answer that. Where did he even get that idea? Outrageous!

"I'm no one's husband," he ended up saying.

Shang Qinghua frowned. He closed his eyes and sighed. Saying, "Is it really worth it, leaving the glory his future offered to chase you here? Did I make his life so bad, he chose to leave?"

Honestly? "You were cruel," Shen Yuan said.

"It was for the plot." Shang Qinghua sighed once more. "I had to make him strong."

They both went silent after that.

Shen Yuan was the first one to speak. Asking, "What happened to that world?"

"Last thing I remembered, it glitched." Shang Qinghua frowned. "Like a bad video game. Everyone just kind of stopped moving. Then everything went dark.. and I woke up back here."

"It was pretty much dead along with the protagonist," he continued to say. Holding his hand up to massage his temples. "Though we can't really say he's dead now, can we? To think that he died just to become a wife.."

Shen Yuan didn't pay the comment any mind. He said instead, "I told him I kept his pendant."

Shang Qinghua turned to look at him. Asking, "The one that he lost, *that* jade pendant?"

"It was in my inventory," said Shen Yuan. "The system…"

Shang Qinghua immediately straightened up. “You had it with you?”

“I lost it when I got back here.” Shen Yuan leaned against the wall. Then he told him about how he had obtained the item; how it was supposed to be the important *key* to his survival.

Reciting what the system had told him, he even said the important thing thrice: “Serious OOC! Serious OOC! Serious OOC! Had to remain a bystander while watching your disciple getting beaten! Congratulations! Here’s the protagonist’s most treasured item to save your life in the future.”

It was, more or less, like that in his memory. But Shang Qinghua seemed to understand what he was trying to say.

“You’ve read the story. You know how important it is for him,” said Shang Qinghua. “He must’ve been upset to know that you’ve been keeping it all along.”

Did Airplane Bro need to say that out loud?! He knew. It was not like he could use the item easily too.. he couldn’t give it back even if he wanted to.

“But you really just watched him getting beaten up?” Shang Qinghua asked, looking at his friend with doubts written clearly all over his face. “You, who’d jump to protect your little white lotus without a thought?”

“My OOC was still not unlocked,” Shen Yuan muttered. “I couldn’t directly stop them from bullying him.”

“But you did something,” Shang Qinghua noted.

Shen Yuan shook his head. It felt like a distant memory, but he was sure he wasn’t really helping much. Saying, “I just threw some leaves.”

“You mean, those sharp leaves? Ones that could cut like knives?”

At this, Shen Yuan nodded. Saying, “The system wouldn’t let me approach them.”

“Then you did something!” Shang Qinghua exclaimed, smacking the back of his friend’s head. The audacity!! Shen Yuan was so shocked, he could only gape at the mistreatment! No one shall smack his head!!

Though Shang Qinghua’s next words undo-ed all the revenge plots in his head: “You protected him!”

Shen Yuan frowned. “I didn’t,” he said.

Shang Qinghua waved a hand dismissively, reaching for Shen Yuan’s head once more but the latter was quick to flee.

But his hand was long! He could reach him just fine, ruffling his hair.

Shen Yuan was startled!

Even more when: “Bro, you’re so small here can I call you Didi?”

The height difference wasn’t much!!! Outrageous!

“Cucumber Didi,” Shang Qinghua tried, seeming satisfied with the look of horror on his friend’s face.

He felt much safer in this body. Even without the golden core, this one was much taller than the self-insert Shang Qinghua in the novel!

“Stop that.” Shen Yuan slapped his hand.

Shang Qinghua didn’t bother moving away. Asking, “So you’re not anyone’s husband?”

“No!”

The—mind you, *slightly* taller man hummed in approval. He still needed to make sure though. Asking, “Not anyone’s wife?”

Now that.. earned him a punch on the gut.

Though it’d take so much more than that to shut him up.

“And the child..?”

“Mine! I gave birth to her! What! That’s what you want to hear? You wish! She’s my niece! Fight me, you little shit!”

And so they fought.

They ran around the house like a child, with Shen Yuan shouting, “Where’s your manners! Take your shoes off when entering the house!”

“Maybe if you stop running after me, I could take them off!”

“Fine!”

“You stop first!”

“No, you!”

“SHOES!!”

No one caught. No one got caught either.

Both ended up on the floor, trying to catch their breaths.

It was.. quite a pathetic sight. Good thing they were no longer peak lords! This battle would bring shame to the entire sect!

“I think,” Shang Qinghua started, finally *finally* taking his shoes off. “He deserves to know.”

Shen Yuan, who was by now lying down on the floor with his arms behind his head, turned to look at his friend with an incredulous stare. “About this? No way.”

“About the whole transmigration thing, you dumb.” Shang Qinghua threw one of his shoes at his friend. And missed terribly. It was a poor aim. “The system. The things it made you do.”

“Let him know that you didn’t mean to hurt him. Or put the blame on me at least. Tell him I wrote all the bad things,” Shang Qinghua continued. “I can disappear from his life. You can’t.”

Shen Yuan pushed himself up, unable to find a word to say.

“I see the way he looks at you,” said Shang Qinghua. A sad smile made its way to his lips as he shook his head. “I might not know him as well as I know Bing ge. But he’s still my son.”

“Time doesn’t heal, you know.” It was Shang Qinghua’s turn to lie down on the floor. Looking up at Shen Yuan who stared at the distance with a thoughtful look on his face. “Those memories.. they don’t really disappear. He doesn’t get over them, that kid. He lives with them.”

“He suffered enough,” said Shang Qinghua, this time to himself. “I think you should tell him."

And repeated; "He deserves to know."

Luo Binghe was asleep.

For real this time—not pretending.

Shen Yuan's heart broke at the traces of tears on his lover's cheeks.

He was gentle when he pulled him into his arms, lips lingering on the disciple's forehead.

Airplane Bro was right.

He deserves to know.

But not now. Not.. now.

He used to dread the idea of Luo Binghe finding out. He used to think that if the disciple had known about the whole.. transmigration thing, that he was just a mere impostor, he would've been dead for long.

That felt like a long time ago.

He used to see this man in his arms solely as a protagonist from a book. His life was written out already, despite the whole plot holes. He had read about him already. He knew him; he knew what would happen. He also knew what would happen to *himself*—to Shen Qingqiu.

But then he found out Luo Binghe was *not* just a character from a book. Just like him, he knew how to feel. The feelings were real. The pain.. was real.

He might've realized that a little too late. He had hurt this man, the damage was done.

Luo Binghe had been hurt countless times. He had endured countless times, too. All by himself.

And to let him know that the suffering was necessary..? That almost all of it was part of the plot?

Shen Yuan couldn't bear to hurt him like that.

But he deserves to know.

And he would tell him.

But not now.

Chapter End Notes

He deserves to know, don't you think?

Chapter 25: brave gege!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Did you talk to him?”

Shen Yuan shook his head. “He keeps running away.”

It was true. Luo Binghe rolled off the bed the moment Shen Yuan woke up. He’d been avoiding him ever since.

“Why didn’t you hold him back?” Shang Qinghua asked, huffing a laugh as he continued, “He said you do that a lot. Dragging him back to bed.”

True. But…

“You’re scared,” said Shang Qinghua before his friend could even speak.

Shen Yuan sighed. Closing his eyes as he leaned back on the couch, hand reaching up to massage his temples. “Maybe I am.”

And they sat like that in silence. Shen Yuan busy with his thoughts, Shang Qinghua busy shoving food into his mouth.

Oh, to be able to eat his son’s cooking.. Shang Qinghua was honored!

Though Luo Binghe had protested when he saw him heating up last night’s leftovers, insisting that he’d cook a warm meal for him instead. Shang Qinghua was so happy, he shed a tear!

He still ate the leftovers anyway. There’d always be space for more food! Especially the ones made by his son!

He almost choked when he heard a high-pitched scream coming from the kitchen.

Was that his son?! Who taught him to scream like that!

He was about to ask his Bro, but Shen Yuan already jumped off the couch. Rushing to the kitchen like he was born to run.

Shang Qinghua had to reluctantly say goodbye to the food, putting his plate on the table before going after his friend. He knew that nothing in the kitchen could harm Luo Binghe. He just knew.

And the sight that greeted him..

Never had once Shang Qinghua imagined *that* look of horror on his son's face. Shen Yuan also looked horrified! Shang Qinghua was suddenly alerted!

"What happened?" Shang Qinghua asked, but nobody answered.

Luo Binghe glued himself to the counter, with Shen Yuan's niece hiding behind his back. She was giggling though. The only person in the room who seemed unfazed.

"Cockroach!" she squealed, pointing at the floor.

Shang Qinghua turned to look at where she was pointing at. He face-palmed.

A cockroach was indeed there. But Binghe! Binghe!! You've fought monsters!! And Cucumber Bro!! Why do you look so horrified!! The fuck?!!

Shang Qinghua groaned when he saw his friend taking out his phone. It was the newest version of its kind! Very expensive! Was he going to throw it at the cockroach?! Bro!

"What are you doing!" Shang Qinghua exclaimed.

But the answer was even *more* surprising!

"Calling pest control," said Shen Yuan, already typing into his phone.

"Stop that," Shang Qinghua said, rolling up his sleeves as he walked to where the cockroach was. Then he picked it up. With bare hands!

"Brave gege!" Shen Yanxue giggled even more.

Oh, Shang Qinghua liked that. His face looked smug when he straightened up. A cockroach between his fingers.

Shen Yuan looked even more horrified!!!

Though when Shang Qinghua held the poor cockroach up close to Luo Binghe, Shen Yuan immediately put himself between them. Shielding his lover from the cockroach.

Shang Qinghua meant no harm! He was just curious! Asking, "You're scared of this?"

The cockroach tried to wriggle free. Luo Binghe whimpered.

Shang Qinghua gaped.

"This?!" He asked again, this time bringing his hand even closer.

"Fuck," Shen Yuan cursed, trying to kick his friend but still not moving away from his place. Luo Binghe clutched on his lover's shirt like a frightened maiden.

"Fuck!" Shen Yanxue repeated after her Shushu.

Luo Binghe was right. She was sweet. Shang Qinghua liked her already. He laughed at his friend's expression, now seeming horrified for another reason.

It was a hard pill to swallow, but Shang Qinghua accepted that his son.. was afraid of cockroaches. It wasn't an act. Those eyes told him everything he needed to know.

He sighed as he walked out the kitchen, the poor thing still between his fingers.

Before he left, he heard Shen Yuan asking, "Are you okay?"

And Shen Yanxue chirping, "Fuck!"

He laughed.

The pest control really came.

And Shen Yuan insisted that it'd be better for them to wait somewhere else.

"You know, not to disturb them doing their job," he had said before.

You were just scared there'd be another cockroach!! Shang Qinghua wanted to scream, but he let himself get dragged anyway.

Luo Binghe seemed to hesitate when they reached Shen Yuan's car, hand already reaching for the door to the back passenger seat. But the very excited girl in his lover's arms seemed to think otherwise. She screamed, "I want to sit with brave gege!"

And so the seat arrangements were set.

After the cockroach incident, Luo Binghe was back to avoiding his lover. The air felt cold on the front seat. But the backseat was very lively!

Shen Yanxue seemed to be really full of energy. They were, after all, going to the amusement park! She loved that a lot!

Shang Qinghua just kept clapping along whenever she sang, almost tearing up whenever *brave gege* was called.

She held onto his hand once they arrived. Of course, after making sure: "Did you wash your hands?"

Honestly, no. Cockroaches were not a foreign sight to him. He had long given up on washing his hands each time he put those little things out of his room back in the basement. That'd take too much energy. He also wouldn't kill them because then it'd take even more energy! Cleaning the mess wasn't really fun.

So he offered, "My right hand is clean?"

Shen Yanxue seemed happy with the answer. She took his hand, leaving a dejected warm gege and a gawking Shushu behind.

“Does she have a new favorite?” Shen Yuan asked, more to himself.

Luo Binghe sighed. “I guess..” he answered, also more to himself.

They were not really on speaking terms. The car ride was quite awkward for them. At this, both seemed surprised.

They looked at each other, with Luo Binghe instantly avoiding his lover’s gaze. Shen Yuan smiled. It was a sad smile. More reasons for Luo Binghe to avoid looking at him.

“Let’s go,” Shen Yuan ended up saying, gesturing toward the entrance gate with his chin. Luo Binghe nodded.

They walked side by side, both looking at Shen Yanxue who was literally hopping from excitement as she dragged Shang Qinghua along with her. She was the one asking to go here anyway, so the three adults just followed her.

Luo Binghe seemed to loosen up after their second kid-friendly ride. Shen Yanxue held onto his hand, still with Shang Qinghua’s hand clasped in her other one.

The three of them looked happy from behind.

Shen Yuan felt like chugging down a bottle of vinegar.

His heart was so full of hope when his niece finally *finally* ran toward him. Shen Yuan immediately got on his knees, arms spread open to catch her!

She hugged him! Shen Yuan was really happy! But then his hope was crushed when she whispered: “Shushu, toilet.”

Now you remember your Shushu?!

He couldn’t even sulk because she’d been laughing a lot today. His niece looked very happy..

Luo Binghe, too, looked excited.

Maybe he could endure the sourness of the vinegar a little..

When Shen Yuan left with his niece, it was suddenly awkward for Shang Qinghua and his son.

“Why are you scared of cockroaches?” Shang Qinghua couldn’t help but ask. “That one from before wasn’t even big.”

Luo Binghe shuddered. “Germs,” he muttered. “I’ve read somewhere that it carries germs.”

“I.. see,” said Shang Qinghua.

No. He did not see.

Why would the demon lord be afraid of germs?! But anyway. Sure. That could happen.

It was a good day for Shang Qinghua! He wouldn't want to ruin it by thinking of meta theories on *why* his son shouldn't be afraid of cockroaches.

They continued to wander when Shen Yuan and his niece returned.

"Can brave gege go that high?" Shen Yanxue suddenly asked, pointing at what seemed to be the tallest roller coaster at the park.

Shang Qinghua gulped. Not wanting to disappoint her, he said, "Yes." He still turned to look at Shen Yuan for help though.

But being the gremlin that he was, of course Shen Yuan clapped! Saying, "Isn't he really brave? I wouldn't even dare!"

Shen Yanxue nodded, agreeing as she turned her expectant eyes to Shang Qinghua. "Can I see you from here if you wave at me from the sky?"

"Yes."

"No."

Shen Yanxue obviously only heard what she wanted to hear. She turned her gaze to her Shushu. "Yes?!"

Shen Yuan nodded. And when she turned to look back at Shang Qinghua, he knew he was doomed.

He couldn't say no to those eyes!

Shen Yuan seemed a little surprised to see his friend actually going for the ride; he even tried to stop him! Saying, "You don't have to if you can't."

Shang Qinghua gritted his teeth. "I can," he said, full of determination. And so he went for it.

It turned out to be.. not really scary? He even waved at those tiny little beings he couldn't see from above! Laughing from the thrill as the roller coaster dived down!

Since when did he get this brave? Shang Qinghua wasn't sure.

But maybe he deserved the title after all! Brave gege! He was so proud of himself, he kept grinning. He swayed a little, still quite dizzy but feeling excited nonetheless.

"Did you see that!" He asked when Shen Yanxue noticed him coming.

Shen Yuan was clapping for him! Even Luo Binghe was giving him a thumbs up!

The tension between those two was still there, Shang Qinghua knew. He could feel it. But today was a good day!

He felt happy for once. And light. It had been a while since he felt this light. A long while. It almost felt like he could fly.

Maybe another round of roller coaster ride…?

He was thinking when Shen Yanxue seemed to find another thing she wanted to try.

“Can we..” the kid started.

“Yes,” Shang Qinghua nodded.

The amusement park was really huge! There was a lake with huge floating balls—a zorb ball? Shang Qinghua wasn’t really sure what it was called. It kinda reminded him of a hamster ball.. but on water.

It seemed fun! There were only two balls readily available for their turn. Two people for each then!

And when Shen Yanxue declared that she wanted to go with her Shushu, Shang Qinghua sweated a little.

That only left him with one possible partner! Luo Binghe!

Luo Binghe didn’t seem to mind. He went in first, holding up the still-deflated ball so Shang Qinghua could join him inside. Shang Qinghua gulped.

“Ha.. Father and son bonding time, I guess..” he muttered, stepping in as he pretended not to notice the slight tilt of Luo Binghe’s head. He must’ve heard what he just said.

When their ball was filled with air and got pushed to the lake, Shang Qinghua squeaked. The space they could sit on wasn’t really big! This somehow felt even scarier than the roller coaster!

Oh, to float in a ball with the demon lord…

Harmless demon lord, the voice in his head added. But still! Old fears die hard!

Though when he noticed the longing look Luo Binghe threw at Shen Yuan—who seemed to be oblivious that he was being watched, Shang Qinghua’s heart softened.

His son really fell hard, huh..

Shen Yuan was laughing as his niece tried to stand up, immediately falling over and making the ball roll further from the shore.

Shang Qinghua’s own ball was just floating. No one really moved. He didn’t know what possessed him as he got on his hands and knees, crawling to get the ball closer to Shen

Yuan's.

Luo Binghe was surprised! He fell, trying to get up but always failing because Shang Qinghua hadn't stopped. The ball kept moving!

Shen Yanxue was the first one to notice, cupping her mouth with her hands as she shouted for her brave gege and warm gege.

Shen Yuan turned to look at them, the smile on his face seemed to take Luo Binghe's breath away.

The disciple unconsciously lifted his hand, as if to reach for his lover. But they were in different balls! He couldn't reach him even if he wanted to. His heart ached more as Shang Qinghua changed their ball's direction.

When he finally stopped moving, their ball was already so far away from his lover's. Shang Qinghua was sitting down now. Slightly leaning against the surface of the ball.

"You know," Shang Qinghua started. "It won't go anywhere if we don't move."

Luo Binghe noticed. Their ball was just.. floating.

"Sure, the water might take us somewhere if we just wait," Shang Qinghua continued, turning to look at his son. "But what if it's not the direction we wanted?"

The water was too calm. It wouldn't take them anywhere. And so for a little dramatic effect, Shang Qinghua leaned harder against the surface. Making the ball move slightly to the back, drifting further away from Shen Yuan's.

Luo Binghe let out a distressed whine, about to crawl to bring them back close to his lover but stopped himself. Eyes brimming with tears as he turned to look at Shang Qinghua. "I can't.."

"Why?" Shang Qinghua asked.

Luo Binghe shook his head. "I'm scared."

"Of his reasons?"

Luo Binghe nodded. Lips quivering as he tried to hold back his tears.

Shang Qinghua's heart ached at the sight. He sighed, looking away as he said, "I think you're thinking too much." Then he huffed a laugh. Saying, "He's much dumber than what he let on."

"Did you even see the way he jumped to protect you from the cockroach before? How pale he looked after I almost shoved the thing to his face? It wouldn't even harm you! And he was scared! But he jumped anyway," Shang Qinghua heatedly explained. "Man, and don't get me started with the no-cure thing. He knew the cure would be another shitty wife plot. He loathed those things! But he jumped anyway!"

“There’s a cure?” Luo Binghe asked, blinking confusedly. Tears now forgotten.

He had searched everywhere for the poison's cure! He found none! But there was actually a cure?! And his Shizun knew?! And what’s a shitty wife plot?!

It seemed like Shang Qinghua still wasn’t done: “And the way he jumped to protect you, knowing that the plant body wasn’t fully ready..” at this, Shang Qinghua shuddered. Now that he said it out loud.. he couldn’t help but think that his friend was really dumb. He could’ve been *really* dead…

“...plant body?” asked Luo Binghe.

Shang Qinghua shook his head. Waving a hand dismissively as he turned to look at his son. “He doesn’t think, that idiot,” he said. “He never thinks when it comes to protecting you.”

Luo Binghe was confused. He was feeling so many.. things. But confusion was the highest among all. Especially when Shang Qinghua resumed to speak;

“So if you’re afraid to hear his reasons for not stepping in to help you..” he started. “It was actually much simpler than you thought.”

Shang Qinghua shook his head. Voice small as he spoke, “He couldn’t.”

To Luo Binghe, it didn’t make sense. Shen Qingqiu had all the power to save him from the misery the other disciples had caused him—the misery that *he,* the peak lord himself, had caused him.

It seemed like a distant memory, but..

“...Why?”

“That, you should ask him.” Shang Qinghua gestured at Shen Yuan, who was now looking at them with worry. “But really. Don’t you remember anything weird from that day?”

Luo Binghe frowned. This Shishu of his seemed to know a lot.. but… now that he asked that..

“They stopped beating me up because there were leaves hurting them, as sharp as knives..” Luo Binghe said, eyes widening in realization as he spoke. How could he not remember that last night..?

Shang Qinghua scoffed. Asking, “Do you think they just magically appear?”

Luo Binghe shook his head. Voice barely a whisper as he spoke, “So he didn’t just watch..”

But why kept his pendant away from him..? Luo Binghe didn’t understand.

Shen Yuan and his niece crawled in their ball, seeming to decide that he could no longer watch from afar. When his ball bumped onto his lover’s, he asked, “Are you okay?”

Luo Binghe shook his head. Shen Yuan frowned.

“Let’s go back,” Shang Qinghua said as he started crawling toward the shore. Luo Binghe was still in a daze, but he helped. He wanted to get out of this bubble as soon as he could. He needed to touch his lover. Hold him. Talk to him.

There were so many questions he wanted to ask; questions he *needed* to ask.

Though when he was finally out, he couldn’t say a thing.

Maybe what happened in the past should just stay in the past.

He was grateful for everything he had now. But to think that there was a time when his lover didn’t look at him with such warmth..

Luo Binghe remembered how cold it used to be.

There were memories he wanted so bad to bury, but he couldn’t. He had, perhaps, came into terms that all the torture from the past was just a way to make him strong.

Knowing that his Shizun had been keeping his pendant all along though.. It struck him different. It was even more upsetting to know that he just watched while Luo Binghe had been asking for them to stop.

Luo Binghe never did that. He endured, always. He never fought back either.

But that time he just wanted to keep his pendant safe.. and if his Shizun had heard his plea, how could.. he not grant it?

To think that such a time existed.. it scared Luo Binghe. It also brought back the memory of how he got thrown into the endless abyss.

That time, he pleaded too. But he still got pushed.

He never knew the reason why. It was confusing. Upsetting. Even more so when he clearly remembered how everything was fine before it happened; how he was still his Shizun’s darling disciple.

He thought that he had let go of the fear completely. But turned out it was still there.. deep within his heart. The question of: what if it happened again?

He might’ve knew now that his lover hadn’t just watched when he was defenseless, but what was the reason for keeping his pendant? Why didn't he give it back?

Was it because he couldn’t, like what Shang Qinghua had said before? But *why?*

The gentle touch on his arm pulled him from his thoughts.

“Do you want to go home?” Shen Yuan asked, looking up at his lover with a concerned gaze.

Luo Binghe wasn’t answering, still holding on to the leash of the fake horse as he watched his lover’s face.

The ride had stopped, apparently. People were getting off their horses, but Luo Binghe didn’t look like he’d get off any time soon. And so Shen Yuan asked, “...or would you like to go for another round?”

His lover looked at him like he held the world in his hands. It was also proven countless times that whatever he asked for, he’d grant him.

He felt loved here. With Shen Yuan, he felt happy.

Surely the history.. wouldn’t repeat itself?

But still.. he didn’t think he could go on not knowing..

“Will you tell me everything?” Luo Binghe ended up asking.

Shen Yuan nodded. And it felt like the knots in his heart had slightly loosened.

With that, Luo Binghe got off his horse with the sole purpose of falling.

Shen Yuan caught him.

Chapter End Notes

Me, writing the water hamster ball scene: "their balls touched..."
Me, reading the draft: "....no DELETE"

Chapter 26: how is this not real?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luo Binghe was quiet.

Shen Yuan hoped so badly for his lover to scream at him. Shout. Tackle him to the ground. Throw a punch or two, at least. The world was unfair and Shen Yuan was ready to share the pain.

But Luo Binghe was quiet.

And Shen Yuan wished he could stop talking.

But he couldn't. He promised he'd tell his lover everything. As soon as they got home, he did.

Not leaving a single detail; the novel. The stupid wife plots and the constructive criticism ("Hate," corrected the stupid author himself) comments that followed after. Waking up in Cang Qiong. The system. OOC. B points. The necessary push.

He told him that if he could stop it from happening, he would. But the system said no. He asked. Many times, he asked. And the answer was always the same : he couldn't.

He couldn't stop fate.

He also told him that the stab wasn't in the plot, it came purely from him. He apologized.

His lover's fingers twitched in his hold.

Luo Binghe didn't try to pull his hand away. And it hurt Shen Yuan even more because he *knew* his lover wanted to pull away.

Shen Yuan didn't dare to loosen his grip.

And when he was finally done talking, Luo Binghe's first words were: "I see."

Shang Qinghua frowned. "Bro, I think your words are too hard to understand."

Luo Binghe shook his head. This time freeing his hand from his lover's hold as he spoke, "No. I understand."

Shang Qinghua didn't seem convinced. Though he flinched when Luo Binghe turned to look at him.

"So that's what you meant by father and son bonding time before? I'm the son?" Luo Binghe asked. There was no malice in his voice. No sign of rage. "Because you created me?"

How could he be so calm? Shang Qinghua had no idea. Taking a deep breath, he nodded. “I wrote you,” he said. “And all those bad things that happened to you. I wrote them.”

Luo Binghe nodded. Gaze unfocused as he mumbled, “I see..”

The room was engulfed in silence for a while before Luo Binghe searched for Shang Qinghua’s eyes. Almost desperate when he asked, “And all the people I know?”

“I wrote them too,” Shang Qinghua confirmed.

“Then all those hatred…?”

This time, Shen Yuan was the one answering. “They don’t hate you,” he said, wanting to reach for his lover but stopped himself from doing so. “You’ve done nothing wrong.”

“Some exist to bring misery upon your life. They’re needed to make you strong. They have no reason to be unkind to you, I just wrote them that way,” said Shang Qinghua. “While a few exist to show you kindness. Just a glimpse, if I might say. How would you yearn for something if you have no idea what it feels like? Why would you bother to go through all that?”

“Then why do I kill people? Why do I have so many wives? Why does it sound like I’m thirsty for power?”

At this, Shang Qinghua shook his head. His face looked much older, somehow. Laughter and smiles from the day all gone.

“You’re not mad for power. You wanted to be heard. *I* wanted to be heard. And when you’re strong, people would have no choice but to *hear* you,” he said. “That’s what I wrote. But you seemed to find another reason. Another purpose. One I didn’t write. I think you’re well-aware of that?”

He kept his eyes on his son as he continued, “That you’re different from the Binghe I wrote.”

The question was answered by Luo Binghe’s shift of focus; looking at his lover who seemed to be a little lost.

“This life you’re living, you have full control. I wrote your past, but I won’t write your future.” Shang Qinghua let out a shaky breath. Voice small as he spoke, “I’m sorry you had to go through all that.”

Luo Binghe was still not looking at him. Even when he got up from the couch and Shen Yuan asked, “Where are you going?”

Shang Qinghua didn’t answer. Instead he said, “If I had known that you’re real...” halting his steps as he choked out, “I’m sorry.”

And left.

Luo Binghe got up not long after. Saying, “I’m going to cook dinner.”

Shen Yuan reached for his lover's wrist, still a little confused on how things had gone. "We can just order?"

Luo Binghe freed his hand. "I'll cook."

Not sparing his lover a glance, he left.

Shen Yuan followed his lover to the kitchen.

Though before he could make his presence known, Luo Binghe had already noticed. Saying, "I'd like to be alone."

Shen Yuan nodded, taking a few steps back to stick himself to the wall. He would not disturb!

He watched Luo Binghe from afar, not quite knowing what to do now that truths were spilled. The response was.. not like what he imagined.

Shang Qinghua seemed to be more upset. He was nowhere to be found, Shen Yuan had checked.

Shen Yanxue had left before all the talks, dragging Shen Ziyi along with her as a shield from her sulking Baba.

The house was too quiet. Would that be why Luo Binghe found him too loud? Shen Yuan hadn't made any noise! But why was his lover looking at him like that?

"Alone," said Luo Binghe.

Shen Yuan understood! He had given him some space despite having all the urges to hold him close! But Luo Binghe's gaze stayed on him. And..

Shen Yuan's lips parted in a small *oh.* Shoulders unconsciously slouching as he asked, "Without me?"

Luo Binghe almost choked. If his mind wasn't in such a mess, he would've squealed. Too cute! Stop!

He still spread his arms though.

Shen Yuan hesitated. He ended up waddling toward his lover before crashing into his arms. Luo Binghe huffed a laugh.

Holding his lover close, he felt lighter already. But still. It was a lot to take.

Luo Binghe brought his lover closer, pressing their foreheads together as he promised, "Just for a while.." he then leaned in for a peck. Letting him go as he spoke, "Give me time."

Shen Yuan nodded. He kept glancing back as he walked out the kitchen. Luo Binghe waited.

And when he was finally out, Luo Binghe started cooking. Hoping that it would make his mind clear.

Luo Binghe didn't call him for dinner.

It was a maid who came and told him that dinner was ready. With no Luo Binghe in sight, Shen Yuan waited.

And waited.

The food was cold when he finally ate.

Alone. He slept alone too.

So when he woke up and found Luo Binghe standing on the balcony, Shen Yuan just.. rushed. to his lover. And halted when Luo Binghe turned his face.

"Do you need.." Shen Yuan started, voice still hoarse from sleep. "Still? Alone?"

Luo Binghe smiled. It was a genuine one. And when he shook his head, Shen Yuan let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding.

"Were you up doing laundry?" Shen Yuan asked, noticing the wet clothes hanging on the railing as he approached.

"I couldn't sleep." Luo Binghe sighed, sitting down on the floor before turning his expectant eyes to his lover. Immediately snuggling closer when he followed.

"You should've woken me up," said Shen Yuan, putting his arm around his lover to pull him even closer.

It was still dark. There were no stars. With dripping wet clothes right in front of their eyes, it was not at all a romantic sight.

But Luo Binghe was leaning his head on his shoulder, eyes fluttering shut as he let out a soft hum. And there was no place Shen Yuan would rather be than here—right next to his lover.

"I tried reading," said Luo Binghe. Voice sounding small as he resumed, "I couldn't."

Shen Yuan reached to stroke his lover's hair, pressing a kiss to his temple as he said, "You don't have to."

Luo Binghe shook his head. "There's something I need to know."

At this, Shen Yuan hesitated. He offered anyway, "You could.. ask? I'll answer."

His memory of the novel was still fresh! He'd been binge-reading before he transmigrated.

Luo Binghe slowly pulled away. Looking up at his lover as he spoke, “What part of me is real? What feelings were written, what feelings were entirely my own? Is this real? Am I real?” He shook his head then. Asking, “Is there even anything real about me?”

Shen Yuan’s answer came without a doubt, “You’re real.”

"Office romance isn't realistic to you but you're telling me I'm real?" Luo Binghe chuckled, though his eyes looked very sad. "How?"

Unable to look at his lover's eyes, he turned to look at the sky. “You know…”

"I was born into this," he started. "I don’t have to earn anything when everything is already provided."

"I’m not really complaining. It was an easy life," he added.

Luo Binghe was listening. He knew. And so he resumed, "I fell asleep each night thinking that if I didn't wake up the next day, I would have no regrets. I’ve lived well."

"I’ve loved. I’ve been loved. I’ve never had any thoughts of starting my own family, you see. I’ve given my all to this one. But they’re slowly.. leaving. My baby sister grew up really fast too. She started to spend her time mostly with her friends, and I know one day she’d leave."

Luo Binghe leaned his head back on his lover's shoulder. Asking, "Were you lonely?"

"For the first time in my life, I was. And it was scary to see them leaving." Shen Yuan rested his cheek on top of his lover's head. Saying, "My love for my siblings stays the same, of course. But I know it’s not the kind of love that would make them bloom. It was scary, but it also feels good to see them happy. It feels good to know that the earth would rotate just fine without me."

Silence.

And; "Then I woke up in your world."

"At first I thought I just.. don’t want to die that way. You know. Human stick." Shen Yuan let out a soft chuckle. Shaking his head at the thought. "But turns out I don’t.. want to die after all?"

Luo Binghe had known about the original Shen Qingqiu and the human stick. What the man did to the original Luo Binghe was cruel, but it was also cruel knowing that he was given no choice. That he was written like that.

It was set up from the start.

And for his lover to have that fear.. Luo Binghe understood. It made sense, somehow. The things he did..

"I won't hurt you like that," Luo Binghe whispered.

"I know." Shen Yuan pulled him closer. "I didn't know back then. I kept falling asleep thinking of plans to survive. To escape your evil plans that somehow only existed in my mind. I misunderstood you. I hurt you too. I meant it when I said I want to make it up to you. And I won't leave you alone. Not again."

Luo Binghe trusted him.

Shen Yuan exhaled. "Now that you're here, I've been.. happy."

"It's a different kind of happy," said Shen Yuan, smiling at the memory of how his brother described it: *you're blooming*.

"After a long while of just living, it's like I finally found things that I want to do." His voice was soft when he spoke, "Not just to kill time.. but to live in it."

"I fall asleep and wake up each day feeling itchy right here," Shen Yuan said, tapping at his own chest. "It tickles. Like when you said you feel full right here? I've been feeling like that too."

He pulled away then. Making his lover look up at him as he said, "Binghe, I've never felt more alive. How is this not real? How are *you* not real?"

Shen Yuan's eyes widened as he felt Luo Binghe's nails scratching his chest. "What are you doing?" He asked.

"You said it was itchy," Luo Binghe mumbled.

He kept scratching. And Shen Yuan was at a loss for words. He didn't mean literal itch??

"I was just-"

"I know," Luo Binghe cut him off. "Just. Let me.. process."

"Okay," said Shen Yuan, pulling his lover back into his arms. Luo Binghe kept scratching his chest. It felt comforting, somehow. Though a little weird.

Luo Binghe was the first one to break the silence; "I used to think that I can't live without you."

"The original Luo Binghe would have no such thoughts," Shen Yuan testified.

Luo Binghe scoffed. "The thoughts were purely mine?"

"Mm. I've never read such things in the novel," said Shen Yuan. He frowned though. "You said you used to. Does that mean you can live without me now?"

At this, Luo Binghe bit his shoulder. Oh??? Was that a yes? Was that a no?! Binghe! Speak!!

Shen Yuan was about to ask once more when Luo Binghe said, "It somehow changed."

A yes then…?

Shen Yuan must've looked so heartbroken, Luo Binghe laughed. He cupped his lover's cheeks. Looking into his eyes as he spoke, "I want to live with you."

Shen Yuan blinked.

"I realized want is a strong word. A strong feeling," said Luo Binghe, thumb moving to caress his lover's cheek. "You showed me how it feels."

"I showed you?"

"Mm." Luo Binghe nodded. He tilted his head, seeming to think for a while before saying, "It's weird."

"I used to only know how to need," Luo Binghe said. “I need to eat. I need to survive. I need to be strong. I need to get stronger. There were times.. when I want. Like that time I wanted to serve you warm congee. But I guess the need to impress you was stronger, the want got pushed back deep within.”

Shen Yuan reached for his lover’s wrist, leaning closer against his palm. Luo Binghe smiled.

“To be able to want is a luxury. I couldn't afford that," said Luo Binghe.

“But these days it's been a series of wants. I want to eat cakes. I want to go somewhere nice. I want to write down our lists. I want to fall asleep in your arms. I want to cook. I want to..” Luo Binghe trailed off. Asking, "If I tell you I love you, would you believe it’s real?"

"I would," Shen Yuan answered.

Luo Binghe’s eyes were wide as he asked, "Because you’ve never read it?"

Shen Yuan bumped their foreheads. "Because I can feel it, you silly."

It was quite hard, it hurt! But Luo Binghe didn’t even flinch. Demanding, "But it’s not in the novel?"

"It’s not,” Shen Yuan confirmed.

At this, Luo Binghe relaxed. He wrapped his arms around his lover’s waist as he buried his face on his chest. “I’m glad,” he mumbled, nuzzling even more when he felt his lover’s hand on the back of his head. “I think I can read it now.”

"You wanna read now?" Shen Yuan asked, fingers threading through his lover’s hair.

"No.” Luo Binghe shook his head, climbing up his lover’s lap. Sighing as he basked himself in the familiar warmth. “Tomorrow."

Cradling his lover close to his chest, Shen Yuan wanted to squeal in delight. He missed this! He missed him.

Speaking of tomorrow..

Shen Yuan asked, "What’s your to-do list for tomorrow?"

"I left it blank," the disciple mumbled. Shen Yuan also didn’t write his own. It felt weird.. writing alone.

"So we can write together?" Shen Yuan asked, hope soaring high.

“Mm.” Luo Binghe’s voice was slightly muffled against his chest. But Shen Yuan still could hear it, loud and clear; "So we can write together."

Chapter End Notes

I think what troubled binghe the most is knowing that he's a fictional character.. with the amount of novels he had read with his lover (and all those "this is not realistic" comments), he just couldn't help but wonder.. Is this real? Is he real?

And qinghua.. oh how i have so many thoughts about him. I just couldn't help but think that he wrote his son the way he wanted himself to be; strong. Heard. As Airplane, he was heard. He had power. Mean comments directed toward him? He didn't even have to lift a finger! there were people defending him already.

But those readers of his were like bingge's wives.. they don't really know him. He was, after all, alone.

And it upsets him greatly to know that he'd been seeing it all wrong. Binghe's life here, compared to the OG one, was very domestic and yet he seemed very happy. Power wasn't the key.

Spending the day as this "brave gege" and how these people listened to him even as his own self, having a glimpse of what it's like to be heard.. as himself.. he yearned for that too. He wished he could stay. But how could he? Binghe must've been very upset... he had no rights to stay. (or so he thought)

Chapter 27: up!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was awkward at first. Reading PIDW together.

They'd spend their time sitting next to each other, reading from the computer screen on their respective chairs.

Luo Binghe would try to keep his expression neutral, but Shen Yuan noticed the way his lover gritted his teeth. The way his hand clenched into a fist.

There were parts where Luo Binghe asked to be left alone. Each time he asked, Shen Yuan would nod. Telling his lover he'd wait outside before leaving the room.

There were also parts where Luo Binghe reached for him. Shen Yuan then would hold him close.

Today Luo Binghe did neither.

They were reading very slowly, and Shen Yuan was usually patient waiting for his lover to scroll down the page.

But this time the screen stayed on a certain.. part. Shen Yuan found it hard not to seethe with anger.

Luo Binghe seemed to notice. Stating, "You don't like him."

His lover was already looking at him when Shen Yuan turned his face. "I don't," his mouth moved before he could stop himself. "He's trash. I remember writing a longass comment on why he needed to get castrated."

Shen Qingqiu had become a part of him, yes. But this one they were reading.. it wasn't him. It was even more upsetting to remember that Luo Binghe had been living with this memory, thinking that it was him.

Shen Yuan didn't like that thought.

He extended his arm to touch his lover only to stop midair; hesitating. Luo Binghe took his hand though. Bringing it close to his cheek as he asked, "He needed to get castrated?"

"He kept hurting you," said Shen Yuan. Frowning as he resumed, "He didn't treat the other disciples right too. And how dare he have impure thoughts on your Shijie! That's a crime."

Luo Binghe nuzzled on his lover's palm, trying to hide his smile from view.

His lover was literally fuming!

To see that someone could get this upset *for* him.. to know that he was not entirely alone all along.. Luo Binghe felt like he could breathe easier.

Deciding that it was enough reading for the day, Luo Binghe pulled his lover to sit on his lap. Ignoring Shen Yuan's cry of protest as he buried his face on the crook of his neck. Letting out the words he'd been keeping in his head, "You didn't pour tea on me."

"I didn't." Shen Yuan stopped trying to get off his lap. Arms cradling his lover's head close to his chest as he spoke, "I would never."

Luo Binghe looked up as he stated, "I'm precious to you."

Shen Yuan didn't even try to look away. Those words no longer made him shy. "You are," he confirmed.

Luo Binghe smiled. Shen Yuan smiled too.

Then.. "Can I see your comments?"

Shen Yuan choked on air.

Alright, so.

Getting his account banned didn't remove his trace. Shen Yuan's comments were still there. Left untouched.

And why were there so many comments from *banned_user_peerless_cucumber?!* They were literally in every chapter!

Shen Yuan almost wished the ground could swallow him whole.

He, apparently, was not thick-faced enough to hear his comments getting read out loud!

He was so ashamed, he wanted to run!

But where could he run to when his lover had been holding him tight?! Their reading sessions had really changed so much, it made Shen Yuan a little dizzy.

Luo Binghe would make him sit on his lap. He'd then read with his chin rested on Shen Yuan's shoulder, reading faster now that he had something to look forward to in each chapter.

"I know what it's about," Luo Binghe said once his lover asked why he scrolled so fast. "I'd like to see your thoughts."

Shen Yuan then would pretend not to hear as his comments were brought into the spotlight.

There were many profanities! But they seem to make Luo Binghe.. giggle? And maybe Shen Yuan could.. bear the shame.. a little?

Anyways.

Luo Binghe got back to scrolling down slowly once he found a scene he deemed foreign.

As he found more foreign scenes, it no longer felt like reading his own diary.

But some parts were still eerily similar to his own memory, Luo Binghe couldn't help but say, "I didn't do that." Or, "That's not me." Then he'd hesitate. Asking, "...Right?

The first papapa scene was the one that got him huff. Announcing, "That's not me."

Luo Binghe seemed very confident! Looking smug as he added, "I wouldn't be able to get it up."

Shen Yuan coughed. "You what?"

"I wouldn't be able to get it up," Luo Binghe repeated.

Shen Yuan gaped at his lover. What was that supposed to mean?!

They were reading on the bed with Shen Yuan's phone. Untangling himself from his lover's arms, he demanded an answer. "You wouldn't be able to get *what* up?"

Shen Yuan's eyes widened as he followed his lover's gaze. Glancing down at..

"This," said Luo Binghe, proudly patting at his sky pillar. "It only listens to you."

"Oh." Seeming to be in a daze, Shen Yuan nodded. "I see.."

His eyes lingered.

Luo Binghe's heart was growing with anticipation as his lover reached out, hand hovering right above his crotch.

"Up," Shen Yuan commanded.

...and the anticipation was all gone. Just like that.

He watched his lover's favorite movies obediently enough to know where that line and hand gesture came from.

Does it look like a magic broomstick to you?! Luo Binghe wanted to scream!

Instead he asked, "Are you dumb?"

Luo Binghe was blushing. And the question sounded so genuine, Shen Yuan chortled.

"It doesn't seem to listen," said Shen Yuan. Clearing his throat before trying once more; "Up."

"You're dumb," Luo Binghe answered for himself.

At this, Shen Yuan laughed.

Chapter End Notes

they're reading together!:o

Chapter 28: surprise?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shen Ziyi and Granny left.

Shen Yuan was conflicted to know that their reason to stay in this house was *him* all along. That they were worried.

And now that he'd been eating well and Luo Binghe was there, Shen Ziyi had brought the topic up like it was no big deal.

"Have I been holding you back?" Shen Yuan couldn't help but ask.

Thinking that her sister had turned down scholarship offers to stay here.. Shen Yuan felt like a jerk. Even more so for not knowing that she did it *for* him. How could he be so dense, he wondered.

It must've shown on his face that he wanted to cry because Shen Ziyi had reached to hug him. And she wasn't the type to give hugs!

The awkward pat on his back was the one that made him lose it. Crying to his sister's shoulder as he apologized for not noticing. He'd take care of himself better if he had known; to not worry them. To not hold them back.

Shen Ziyi had the audacity to smack him on the head. "We're worried because we love you," she said. "We stay because we want to."

"Moving out wouldn't change a thing," she quickly added, pulling her brother even closer.

It had taken a whole evening of convincing that he was *never* a burden to her for him to calm down. That she was only leaving the house, not the family. That she'd still be his little sister. Nothing would change.

Shen Yuan had so many tears! He even got confused on why he couldn't stop crying. He didn't cry when his brothers moved out! He even drove his parents to their new house, parting with a smile! He didn't cry even if he wanted to!

When he apologized for crying, Shen Ziyi smacked him again.

He looked like a total mess when Luo Binghe finally fetched him from his sister's room. And surprisingly, Shen Yuan had felt no shame for being seen in this state. He felt relieved instead.

Seeing Luo Binghe, he felt like things were going to be okay.

If she had left sooner, Shen Yuan would've let her go with a smile. Shen Ziyi seemed to be well aware of that too; she knew her brother would act like everything was fine.

He'd wither alone.

But he wouldn't have to act this time. She knew he would be fine.

And she was right.

Days after Shen Ziyi and Granny left, Shen Yuan understood why they seemed so convinced.

Nothing really changed. Shen Ziyi was no longer there, but they bickered on the phone often enough for Shen Yuan to not immensely feel the loss. Luo Binghe would call Granny often too!

Shen Yuan spent most of his days doting on his lover, following him around like a little duckling.

Luo Binghe had found a new hobby of watching cooking show, he'd memorize the ingredient list as he watched. He got addicted to home shopping shows too! He'd perk up at those new, shiny pans promoted on tv and Shen Yuan would get them for him.

"You're drooling," Shen Yuan said, wiping the corner of his lover's lips.

Luo Binghe was flustered.

He didn't actually drool! But he was so focused on the cooking show, Shen Yuan wanted to tease him. Actually feeling bad for distracting his lover, Shen Yuan leaned in to kiss his cheek. Saying, "Let's travel."

"We can…?" Luo Binghe asked, eyes widening in surprise.

"Mm. The world is big. So many places to visit, so many foods to try. But." Cupping his lover's jaw, Shen Yuan latched on to his cheek. Nomming on it wetly as he managed to speak between each bite, "This would remain my favorite."

When he finally pulled away, Luo Binghe's cheeks were red. And he only bit one side! The sight made Shen Yuan shriek and dived for his cheek, this time peppering it with kisses.

You can say something like *my dick only listens to you* so smugly but this made you blush?! Binghe!!

If Shen Yuan was a reader, he'd wail at this line; "Can I have you for dinner?"

But Luo Binghe *whimpered.* And Shen Yuan took his time waiting for his answer, despite knowing what it'd be.

Shen Yuan was already climbing onto his lover's lap when the answer came.

"No," Luo Binghe managed to say. Though his hands seemed to be saying otherwise, clutching on his lover. Pulling him closer. Baring his neck as Shen Yuan trailed kisses down his neck.

"No?" Shen Yuan asked, huffing a laugh as he went on. Moving lower.

“Your brother’s in the kitchen,” said Luo Binghe.

Shen Yuan halted. “What?”

“He’s cooking.” Luo Binghe pressed his lover’s head closer to his collarbone, whining as those lips stopped moving.

“What?” Shen Yuan tried to break free, but Luo Binghe’s grip was firm. “Which brother? What do you mean he’s in the kitchen?”

Luo Binghe was still not letting go. Shen Yuan had to tickle his sides for him to wheeze and finally loosen his grip. Rolling off his lover’s lap, Shen Yuan demanded, “Binghe, speak properly.”

There was nothing proper about them! Luo Binghe was flushed and his neck was.. *Oh,* Shen Yuan didn’t remember leaving those there. He took off his lover’s scrunchie, fixing his hair so it’d cover his neck. Asking, “Someone’s visiting?”

“Zhengfei ge,” Luo Binghe said with a pout. It was supposed to be a secret! But he found it hard to lie as he spoke, “He’s cooking dinner. I think Yixing ge is already here too...”

Shen Yuan was confused! “What do you mean he’s already here? My brothers are here and *I* don’t know?”

“A-Yi is coming too..”

“*What?”*

Luo Binghe chuckled awkwardly, eyes widening with hope as he looked at his lover. “Surprise..?” then he reached for his sleeve. Saying, “Please don’t tell her you know from me. Can you act surprised?”

Shen Yuan was in a daze. But he said, “Yeah.” Reaching to hold his lover’s hand as he faked a gasp. “Like this?”

Luo Binghe huffed a laugh as he shook his head. “Too big!” Then he demonstrated the gasp he seemed proper. “Just this much.”

Shen Yuan played along, and it was all that it took for them to break into a fit of giggles.

So it turned out his sister was the one arranging this. And the words were out that Shen Yuan cried like a baby when his sister moved out! Shen Zhengfei was definitely going to tease him for that. But it was nothing Shen Yuan couldn’t bear, it’d be okay as long as he could spend

time with his siblings. And if he had to tone down his excitement and act surprised later, he would!

He was prepared! Though when the time came for Shen Yuan to act surprised to see his siblings, Luo Binghe leaned in and whispered, “They’re staying for the night.”

Shen Yuan nodded. Already faking a gasp.

But Luo Binghe wasn’t done yet;

“If you wake up early tomorrow, you can have me for breakfast.”

Shen Yuan stopped functioning.

Chapter End Notes

so. two / three chapters left to wrap things up,, i'm so excited (and nervous).. this is the first chaptered fic i've ever posted and looking at the word counts (and hits and kudos and comments and AND YOU)) make me tear up a little. a a a aa

also unrelated to this chapter but you know how there are things that:
1. sibling can't, i can (learn for them))(or for yourself so you can tease them about it)
2. sibling can, i can (learn from / with them)(OR i'm petty if you can then I CAN too mom come and praise ME)
3. sibling can, i won't even bother (DON'T even look at me i won't do it)

and shen yuan got THREE siblings with different hobbies imagine the horny Grip when binghe finally gets to see his lover on a jet ski.. OR when..... -> intentionally left blank because i stopped functioning

Chapter 29: that's THE demon lord?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I've been meaning to ask you something."

Glancing at his brother, Shen Zhengfei stubbed his cigarette out and hid his ashtray. Waving his hand as if it'd help removing the trace of what he supposed, *stuff didi shouldn't see.* "What is it?"

Shen Yuan took it as a cue to step out on the balcony, taking a seat next to his brother as he said, "Promise me you won't tell Da-Ge."

"You trust me more than you trust him?" Shen Zhengfei asked, eyes widening in surprise. That was rare! *Very* rare! He didn't remember the last time he gained such privilege!

Shen Yuan looked thoughtful. Saying, "For this matter, yes."

Oh, isn't he a reliable gege! Shen Zhengfei would surely brag to everyone about this! He sat up straight. Trying not to look excited as he asked, "What is it? Ask out."

"Can you make a fake ID?" asked Shen Yuan. Though before his brother could answer, he went on talking; "No, not fake. Like, I want a valid one. With a real registered number. And a valid passport. And a bank account. And-"

"Do I look like a criminal to you?" Shen Zhengfei cut him off, excitement now all gone. It was not like he couldn't.. but what was all that for!

"You can't?" Shen Yuan asked, looking like a kicked puppy and it really did something to his brother's heart.

Shen Zhengfei tried to keep his expression stern though. Asking, "Who are you trying to smuggle?"

Shen Yuan kept his mouth shut.

But Shen Zhengfei seemed to have already made his guess. "What's wrong with your boyfriend's ID?"

It was quiet for a while. Shen Yuan's voice was small when he finally spoke, "He doesn't have one.."

"How come?" Shen Zhengfei crossed his arms over his chest. "Is he a criminal? Has he been using you?"

Again, Shen Yuan took his time answering. He didn't know where to start.

Taking his own conclusions, Shen Zhengfei's body almost shook with anger. *No one* should take advantage of his didi! "I'm kicking him out," he said. Gritting his teeth as he stood up. But Shen Yuan was fast to hold him back.

"I thought I've died," Shen Yuan said, tugging on his brother's hand. "But I was given another chance to live."

The look on his brother's face was enough to make Shen Zhengfei sit back down. "What do you mean you've died?"

And that was how he found out.

Shen Yuan told him about the transmigration. Surprisingly, Shen Zhengfei didn't interrupt him. He listened carefully with a scowl on his face.

Ending the story on how he got back here, Shen Yuan unconsciously tightened his hold on his brother's wrist. "I've died twice," he said. "Twice, ge. And I had no chances of saying goodbye."

He then shook his head. Gaze almost pleading when he looked up at his brother. "But I don't have plans of saying goodbye now. Not to anyone."

Shen Zhengfei's expression softened. It didn't make sense. But still, his heart reached for his brother. And the first thing he said was; "You fly on swords?"

At this, Shen Yuan chortled. Finally loosening his grip on his brother's wrist as he nodded. "Mm. I was pretty good at it, actually."

Shen Zhengfei chuckled, and Shen Yuan couldn't hold back his smile. Though his face turned serious again once he spoke, "About the ID.."

"I'll do something about it," said Shen Zhengfei, reaching for his brother's hand to give it an assuring squeeze. "You don't have to say goodbye. Not to anyone."

Shen Yuan felt like he'd cry if he opened his mouth. So he held his brother's hand, squeezing it back in a silent gratitude.

They stayed like that for quite a while. Holding hands like back when Shen Yuan was too young to show favoritism.

Shen Zhengfei was the first one to break the silence. "I'm glad you're back."

His voice sounded shaky, like he was holding back his tears as well. He hid that with a chuckle and said, "We should stop before we hug or something."

Shen Yuan's voice wasn't any better. Saying, "What if I want a hug."

The hug came first before the answer. Shen Yuan was already squished in his brother's arms when Shen Zhengfei said, "Then I'll give you a hug."

They both cried.

And it was.. a mess because it was Shen Yuan's first time seeing his brother cry. He couldn't hold back the laughter that escaped his lips, but the sobs were there also. Shen Zhengfei cried harder than he did; if they weren't alone on the second floor, the others would've heard.

By the time they calmed down and went back to the living room, the two long couches were occupied by Luo Binghe and Shen Yixing. Both lying down with a sheet mask on. Slices of cucumbers covering their eyes. Shen Ziyi—definitely the culprit, was nowhere in sight.

Hearing the approaching footsteps, Luo Binghe asked, "A-Yi, has it been fifteen minutes yet? Do I wash my face now?"

"You don't wash, you pat pat," said Shen Yixing who seemed to be a little more experienced. "Let the skin absorb all those essences. Right, Yiyi?"

Shen Zhengfei was quite baffled at the sight. He leaned closer to Shen Yuan. Whispering, "That's *the* demon lord?"

Shen Yuan only laughed.

Shen Yuan *finally* hit the gym.

Though before he could touch any equipment, he was already panting from all the stretching.

His brother was so ruthless at instructing! Even Luo Binghe gave up on planking!

"You ruined him," Shen Zhengfei deadpanned.

He had, somehow, binge-read almost half of PIDW overnight and had *high* expectations of his future brother-in-law. But not even one minute into planking, Luo Binghe was already shaking! Lying limply on the mattress like the activity had taken his soul out of his body.

"He's just sleepy," said Shen Yuan, who didn't really get up after doing the frog stretching. His legs were no longer in frog position though. Now that was just lying down!

Shen Yuan woke up *too* early this morning. But instead of waking up to the promised ravishing his lover offered, they were dragged to the private gym!

He was just about to doze off when his brother ordered, "You. Peak lord, try planking."

Shen Yuan groaned. But he tried anyway, giving Luo Binghe more time to cool down.

"You can't even lift your butt!" Shen Zhengfei threw both his hands in the air. Giving up, he shook his head and stormed off.

Shen Yuan lied back down. Luo Binghe immediately rolled to his lover, nuzzling on his sweaty shoulder.

“What kind of torture was that?” Luo Binghe asked. “My tummy was shaking from the insides.”

“Not torture,” said Shen Yuan, draping his leg over his lover’s torso. Now lying on his side as he pulled Luo Binghe’s head close to his chest, cradling it in his arm. “We should’ve locked our bedroom door.”

Luo Binghe hummed in agreement, snuggling even closer to his lover as he let sleep took over him.

As he heard Luo Binghe’s cute.. little snores, Shen Yuan couldn't hold back his smile. Pulling away a bit to look at his lover’s sleeping face. He giggled then.

“I didn’t ruin him,” he said. A little too late to answer his brother, looking at how he was no longer in the room. Mumbling as he leaned in to press his lips against his lover’s forehead, “I fluffed him up.”

Then as Shen Yuan’s eyes were fluttering closed, Luo Binghe tucked his head under his lover’s chin. Snuggling once more.

Chapter End Notes

time definitely moves slower when we're holding a plank so binghe, baby, you're doing very well

Chapter 30: it's the love seeping in

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alright. Maybe he *did* ruin him.

Luo Binghe had been avoiding him for days.

He didn't know what he did wrong, but it had gotten to the point that Luo Binghe couldn't stand being in the same room as him. He'd flee whenever Shen Yuan was around!

The time they spent together was limited to their sleeping hours. He couldn't hold his lover even then! Luo Binghe would roll away if he did! He tried! Shen Yuan would rather sleep without holding him than letting his lover sleep on the floor.

But enough was enough. What happened to solving problems by talking?! Luo Binghe didn't even give him the chance to ask!

So when he felt the bed dip, he immediately reached for his lover. Pulling him into his arms still with his eyes closed. "Where did you go?" Shen Yuan murmured, nuzzling his lover's hair.

"Bathroom," said Luo Binghe, going stiff in his lover's arms.

Shen Yuan seemed to not notice that though. He hummed softly, nodding as he pat Luo Binghe's head. Saying, "Sleep some more."

Luo Binghe nodded. But he couldn't sleep. Not like this. He wanted so bad to wriggle free from his lover's arms, but he *really* wanted to stay too. He missed this. Maybe he could.. stay for a while...

He was about to close his eyes when he felt it.

Almost panicking as he tried to push his lover away from him.

Shen Yuan only tightened his hold. "I'm not letting you go until we talk."

Luo Binghe whined. Still trying to push him away though he knew he wouldn't be able to hold it even if he was freed.

He stopped thrashing; shutting his eyes closed as he clenched his hands into fists.

The sound came first before the smell.

Luo Binghe froze.

Shen Yuan, too, froze. Loosening his hold on his lover as he slowly pulled away. But then he heard his lover choke back a sob, and Shen Yuan pulled him back into his arms without a thought. “It’s okay,” he said, caressing his lover’s back to soothe him as he started crying. “It’s okay.”

Luo Binghe was too ashamed to speak. So he just.. kept crying to his lover’s chest. He’d been having hard times in the bathroom lately, it just wouldn’t come out no matter how long he waited. His stomach felt weird. His body felt weird. And don’t even get him started on the smell! He was so afraid he couldn’t hold his fart when his lover was around, he kept avoiding him.

He never had constipation this bad in his past life. No, he *never* even had constipation before in his past life! He didn’t know what to do. It was.. confusing. Embarrassing. He couldn’t bring himself to talk about it.

“Binghe, it’s okay,” Shen Yuan said, hand moving up to stroke his lover’s hair. Voice soft when he asked, “How many days has it been?”

“Four,” Luo Binghe croaked out, almost with a whine.

Shen Yuan thought that it was partly—if not mostly, his fault. He never said a thing whenever Luo Binghe didn’t eat his vegetables. Luo Binghe was picky with vegetables! He didn’t like most of those green things! And of course if there were things Luo Binghe didn’t like on his plate, Shen Yuan would eat them for him.

Shen Yuan was also the one who kept buying him bubble tea. He didn’t say a thing whenever his lover chose those sugary drinks over plain water! And all those other sweets he bought him..

It only dawned upon him that those weren’t healthy.

He didn’t have this kind of concern back in Cang Qiong.

“I’m sorry,” Shen Yuan whispered, pressing his lips against his lover’s temple. Pulling away a bit to ask, “Should we go see the doctor?”

Luo Binghe frantically shook his head. “I’m not sick,” he said. He cried even harder, and Shen Yuan just held him tighter.

Shen Yuan spent the day offering Luo Binghe plain water.

Luo Binghe drank, of course. How could he not when his lover had looked at him with those expectant eyes, waiting for him to take a sip from the straw?

Each time Shen Yuan held the bottle close to his mouth, he’d drink. It was a very big bottle. Luo Binghe had never drank that much water in a day, he kept going to the toilet. It was tiring.

His stomach still felt uncomfortable. All that intake of water just made it worse, he didn’t know why his lover kept making him drink. Luo Binghe wanted to cry.

He finally lost it after dinner.

Shen Yuan was offering him the refilled bottle as he asked, “Did you poop yet?”

“No,” Luo Binghe weakly said, pushing his lover’s hand away.

“Does it hurt?” Shen Yuan brought the bottle even closer, the straw now inches away from Luo Binghe’s lips. “Do you want to go to the hospital?”

Luo Binghe hated hearing that. He wasn't sick! How many times did he need to tell him?! Without actually meaning to, Luo Binghe pushed the bottle away. It fell. But he was too upset to care. Shouting, “I’m not sick!” He didn’t want to go to the hospital! It was a scary place! He’d seen many sad scenes in movies and books happening in the hospital! He did *not* want to go!

Feeling like he’d cry if he stayed—with his lover watching him with worried gaze, Luo Binghe stood up. Saying, “I’m tired.”

And stormed off to his room.

Luo Binghe felt bad.

But he really *hated* the thought that he needed to go to the hospital. That something was wrong with his body.

He was staring blankly at the wall when his lover came in.

Looking at the cup in Shen Yuan’s hand, Luo Binghe felt deflated. He didn’t think he could drink more water..

But when Shen Yuan approached and handed him the cup, Luo Binghe took it. Still feeling guilty for what he did earlier. He was reluctant to drink though. Holding the cup as he looked up at his lover with teary eyes.

“Do you trust me?” Shen Yuan asked. Luo Binghe immediately nodded.

“I called the family doctor,” Shen Yuan said. Looking at the fear in his lover’s eyes, he immediately added, “He’s not coming here. We’re not going to the hospital. Not now.”

Luo Binghe’s voice was small when he spoke, “I’m not sick..”

“You’re going to be fine,” Shen Yuan tried to assure him. Leaning in to kiss his lover’s forehead before sitting down next to him. "I have the medicine delivered. The doctor said it'll help. But if it still doesn't get better tomorrow, let's go to the hospital. Just to be safe, alright?”

“But if it works…?”

“Then we don’t have to go,” said Shen Yuan, holding up the tube of said medicine. Asking once more, “Do you trust me?”

Luo Binghe’s answer didn’t change. He nodded. And when his lover helped him with the pill, he swallowed. Drinking the water as he was told.

Shen Yuan took the cup away. Placing it on the bedside table before pulling Luo Binghe into a hug, hand reaching up to stroke his hair. “You’ll be fine,” he whispered.

“I’m tired,” Luo Binghe said. Leaning against his lover’s chest as he finally said, “I don’t understand why you keep making me drink.. It’s only making me feel worse.”

At this, Shen Yuan pulled away. Asking, “Did you know that our body needs water to function?”

Luo Binghe was looking at him with wide eyes. Shaking his head as he said, “I didn’t know..”

“It wasn’t in the lesson I taught you back in Qing Jing,” said Shen Yuan. He seemed to contemplate for a while before saying, “But up to sixty percent of our body is made up of water. If we lack water, then this..” Shen Yuan placed his hand on his lover’s stomach, patting it gently. “Will work harder.”

Then he went on talking about the digestive system, unconsciously slipping into his Shizun mode as he occasionally put his palm on the part he was explaining. Luo Binghe listened intently.

It calmed him knowing that the water he drank was meant to help him.

As Shen Yuan’s explanation was coming to an end, Luo Binghe said, “Tell me more.”

Shen Yuan laughed. Fixing his lover’s position in his arms as he asked, “More?”

Luo Binghe nodded, getting into a proper sitting position as he pulled away from his lover’s arms. “I would like to learn more about the human body.”

Shen Yuan’s expression was soft as he reached for Luo Binghe’s hand, holding it with his palm facing up before tracing his finger along his wrist. “These are veins,” he said. “They carry blood to your heart.”

Gently moving his finger, Shen Yuan resumed, “Deeper down here are arteries. They carry blood to your whole body.”

Luo Binghe’s eyes widened as Shen Yuan brought his hand close to his lips; pressing a kiss to his wrist. “What are you doing?” Luo Binghe couldn’t help but ask.

“Giving them love,” Shen Yuan said as he placed yet another kiss on his lover’s wrist.

Luo Binghe couldn’t take his eyes off his lover. It felt.. warm. His body felt warm all over he had to confirm, “They now carry love?”

“Mm.” Shen Yuan nodded, lowering his lover’s hand as he bit back a smile. Luo Binghe looked very adorable like this! His eyes were wide as he slowly pulled his hand away from Shen Yuan’s grip. Shen Yuan let him.

“It tingles,” said Luo Binghe, hugging his arm close to his chest. “I think it’s the love seeping in..”

Shen Yuan laughed so hard, he shed tears. He didn’t stop even when his lover pounced on him!

Now lying on the bed with Luo Binghe on top of him, Shen Yuan only stopped laughing when his chest was kissed. It was.. very gentle. It lingered too. And when Luo Binghe finally looked up, his eyes were filled with hope. Asking, “Does it work?”

Shen Yuan tilted his head. A soft smile made its way to his lips as he tucked his lover’s hair behind his ear. “What?”

“I gave love,” Luo Binghe said. As if proving his point, he leaned to kiss his lover’s chest once more. Eyes widening as he turned to look up at his lover. “Is it well received?”

Shen Yuan thought that his lover would really be the death of him. Because when Shen Yuan nodded, Luo Binghe just started to.. wiggle his butt. Like an excited puppy. He was grinning really wide too!

And before Shen Yuan could stop himself, he blurted out, “I love you.”

Luo Binghe’s grin got even wider. “I know you do,” he said. Sighing dreamily as he climbed up his lover’s body, burying his face in the crook of his neck. “I’m very lucky.”

At this, Shen Yuan was quite taken aback. He blinked. “Are you not going to say it back?”

“Later when I’m not constipated,” Luo Binghe murmured. “My tummy is acting up again, I could fart any second. It won’t be romantic.”

Shen Yuan huffed a laugh, putting his arms around his lover as he nuzzled his hair. “You could’ve just said it twice,” he said. In an even smaller voice adding, “Stingy.”

Luo Binghe bit him.

The laxative worked.

The moment Luo Binghe stepped out of the bathroom, Shen Yuan was there waiting for him; seated on the floor, hugging his legs with his cheek rested against his knees. He seemed to be asleep and Luo Binghe chuckled at the sight.

“Do you really have to wait here?” Luo Binghe asked, crouching down to help his lover up.

Shen Yuan let himself get hauled. Clinging on to his lover still with his eyes closed as he asked, “Did you poop?”

With the amount of gas he let out throughout the night, Luo Binghe figured there was no use in being ashamed. “Yes,” he admitted.

"You did well," Shen Yuan said, patting his lover's head. "I'm proud of you."

Luo Binghe laughed, tightening his hold on his lover as he said, "Thank you."

"Mm." Shen Yuan nodded. Then he pulled away, swaying a little from the effort.

It was still very early. Shen Yuan was only half awake. But as he looked up at his lover, his eyes were expectant. Waiting.

Luo Binghe was silent. He did say that he'd say it *after* he was done dealing with constipation. But.. "Now?" He squeaked.

Shen Yuan nodded.

It wouldn't be romantic, Luo Binghe thought.

It wouldn't be grand.

It wouldn't be like a scene from romantic novels they spent hours reading; wouldn't be like how he imagined it to be.

But it was heart fluttering, still.

And he *knew* his lover didn't need anything grand.

Luo Binghe took a deep breath. Reaching to cup his lover's cheeks as he finally voiced the words he'd been waiting—*wanting* to say; "I love you."

And Shen Yuan smiled. It was a very big smile. It was, apparently, very contagious too.

Luo Binghe then realized that he was wrong.

It was.. romantic. It felt private. Like the world had stopped moving just to give them all the time they needed. And it felt like they could stay here forever. Smiling and looking at each other and just.. being utterly in love.

Until Shen Yuan had to break it with: "We need air freshener."

Luo Binghe groaned. No need to point that out, thank you very much!

And there the world started moving once more, with gravity pulling Luo Binghe so intensely he fell with a thud.

It seemed like he still had shame left in him as he went back into the bathroom, shutting the door on his lover's laughter and shouted, "Shut up!"

Shen Yuan laughed even more.

Chapter End Notes

Binghe had a Bad constipation and it's Very Upsetting!!!!

But hey their first i love yous🥺 now all we gotta do is drag airplane bro back

Chapter 31: Binghe is Free!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"We need to find you a teacher."

Luo Binghe frowned. Pushing himself up to look at his lover and asked, "What for?"

"This isn't working," Shen Yuan said, letting his hands fall to his lover's waist. Giving him a light pat as he said, "You're not taking me seriously. Get off."

"No." Luo Binghe stayed firm in his place, not getting off his lover's lap. "There could only be *one* Shizun."

"You don't even listen! I told you it'd be much easier writing on paper, but you kept climbing on my lap to write on *my* chest! How is this making any sense?" In all honesty, Shen Yuan did *not* understand.

He'd been teaching Luo Binghe pinyin for quite a while now and the sticky disciple only did things as he pleased! Writing with his finger on his chest as if that'd help him memorize those characters.

It was even worse when he taught him basic human anatomy!

Luo Binghe had listened intently only to ask, "Shizun, blood goes to peepee?"

And Shen Yuan in his scholarly voice had explained about erection, also reviewing that blood vessels thing he had explained in their first impromptu lesson. It ended with some.. love giving. Like, that thing Shen Yuan first did to Luo Binghe's wrist. But down there. The rest was history.

He kept getting distracted, it was impossible to teach him!

"This method is working fine," Luo Binghe said, gaze unwavering as he crossed his arms across his chest. "I know how to write your name now."

"And it took you a whole *week* to memorize that!" Shen Yuan groaned exasperatedly. "It would've been so much easier if you stop being so difficult. If you could just. Write on paper. I could've written you an example to look at, it'd save so much time than me having to finger-draw imaginary letters on your back each time you forgot! You kept ignoring my words and just kept doing things as you please! Kept asking Shizun this, Shizun that but not really listening to my advice! Do you even see me as your Shizun, still? Is it hard to respect me now that I'm mortal and weak?"

It'd been coming slowly as a series of little discomforts. The lack of strength. The loss of power. The muscle-memory things that *no longer* ingrained in his own body. He couldn't lift

heavy objects. He couldn’t play guqin—he didn’t know how to. He didn’t even know whether he could snap open a fan as he used to.

On some days when Luo Binghe fell asleep on the couch, Shen Yuan *wished* he still had his old strength. Though he’d be fine once he saw Luo Binghe’s smile.

Shen Yuan thought that he genuinely enjoyed teaching. He believed that he was good at it. He was confident.

Yet these past few weeks made him think that teaching was just one of them; that it was only something of the original Shen Qingqiu he had borrowed and lost along with the body. It was quite upsetting.

“I..” Luo Binghe tried. His hands fell helplessly on his sides as he tried to scramble off his lover’s lap. Voice gradually getting smaller as he spoke, “I’ll do better.”

Shen Yuan held him by the waist. He kept his lover in place as he sighed, reaching for his hand once Luo Binghe stopped squirming.

“Write my name,” Shen Yuan said, pressing a kiss to his palm before placing his lover’s hand on his chest.

Luo Binghe looked like he was about to cry. His finger moved slowly, tracing characters of his lover’s name on his chest. Clenching his hand into fist once he was done.

“Write yours,” said Shen Yuan.

Luo Binghe kept his eyes low, focusing on his lover’s chest as he started. And halted.

He started over only to halt once more.

He didn't dare look up as he took a shaky breath, about to give it another try when he got pulled into his lover's arms.

"I'm sorry," Shen Yuan whispered, tightening his hold on his lover as he nuzzled his hair. "Let's just stop."

Luo Binghe could feel the guilt running up his spine. He should've been the one to apologize!

He was the one asking to be taught, yet he was also the one ignoring the lessons *and* his lover's feelings all along.

"I'm sorry," Shen Yuan said once more.

Luo Binghe shook his head. Pulling away to look down at his lover and said, “I'm sorry."

“I didn’t listen when you’ve been saying it nicely.” Luo Binghe put his palm against his lover’s chest, thumb moving to caress it soothingly. “I’m sorry I made you feel that way.”

It was startling, but Luo Binghe knew his lover didn't mean to raise his voice. The urge to cry was still there though, it came out as soft sniffles as he asked, "Are you angry?"

"I was," Shen Yuan admitted.

Wiping his tears away with the back of his hand, Luo Binghe put his hand back on his lover's chest. Caressing once more. "How are you feeling now?"

Shen Yuan reached to cup his lover's cheek, gentle as if afraid to hurt him. "Guilty," he said. "I made you cry."

Luo Binghe laughed despite the tears. Shaking his head before catching his lover's hand in his, placing a kiss on his wrist. "I'm okay." He brought his hand down then, intertwining their fingers as he asked, "Are you okay?"

Shen Yuan was scowling, seeming upset at himself as he avoided his lover's gaze.

At the lack of answer, Luo Binghe offered, "Do you want to hold me until you feel better?"

Shen Ziyi had said that Luo Binghe was like Shen Yuan's own personal stress ball. He'd been taking the role *very* seriously ever since.

Shen Yuan's nod was hesitant, but he let out a relieved sigh once he got his lover back in his arms. Nuzzling against his hair as he held him tight.

Luo Binghe obediently clung to his lover as the time passed, only starting to squirm when he could feel the hold loosening. He pulled away just enough to peek at his lover's face. Reminding, "Dinner.." He had to cook!

But Shen Yuan only tightened his hold once more.

"Let's just order," he said, burying his face back in his lover's hair. "Let me hold you some more."

"Can we eat out instead?" Luo Binghe asked, running his finger up his lover's side to jab at his armpit. That earned him a yelp followed by a poor attempt at swatting his hand away. Luo Binghe giggled and jabbed some more. Saying, "I want soft shell crab."

Of course Shen Yuan indulged him. But only *after* he was done recharging; clinging onto Luo Binghe until his energy bar was filled.

He couldn't feel his legs when he finally let his lover off his lap. It was fine. Luo Binghe showered his face with kisses as they waited.

They talked things out over dinner, with Luo Binghe apologizing once more and shyly confessed, "It's actually because you're too sexy."

Shen Yuan almost choked on his shrimp. "What?"

“I *really* wanted to learn. But it’s just. It’s just. Whenever you.. It’s.. you’re so distractingly sexy, I.. can’t.” Luo Binghe could feel his face heating up. Taking a break from eating as he covered his cheeks with the back of his hands. “You look so focused each time you get into your teaching mode and it feels frustrating to *not* have your hands *on* me.”

And Shen Yuan finally knew why it didn’t work out: Luo Binghe had a shizun kink!

The matter was solved like that. With Shen Yuan’s genuine interest as he asked, “So it’s not because I’m a bad teacher?”

“No!” Luo Binghe immediately shook his head. “You’re good. You’re *very* good. Sometimes I wish you’d go on with the lesson and just.. ignore me. But! With your hand on me! Under my shirt, preferably. But do nothing with it! Maybe then I can focus better while you teach me things.”

Luo Binghe was glad they reserved a private room all for themselves. Hopefully the walls were soundproof?

Because when Shen Yuan finally answered, Luo Binghe whimpered.

“You can’t,” Shen Yuan said, sounding confident as he peeled his shrimp. Not even looking at his lover when he added, “You’ll writhe and beg until I touch you more.”

And before Luo Binghe could recover, Shen Yuan put the peeled shrimp on his lover’s plate. The gesture had seemed *so* easy—so normal, like he didn’t even need to choose between his lover’s plate and his own.

Looking at the shrimp, Luo Binghe suddenly felt like tearing up.

It was only then that he realized he’d been eating more shrimps than the soft shell crab! But he didn’t remember peeling any! He only remembered saying that the shrimp tasted good *once* and suddenly he kept having more of that thing!

“I love you,” Luo Binghe said.

Shen Yuan only laughed. “Eat first,” he said. “Let’s test out my theory later.”

—

Shen Yuan was right.

He was *so* right Luo Binghe ended up saying, “I need a tutor.”

While the past few weeks had felt like a teenage wet dream came true, Luo Binghe meant it when he said he really wanted to learn!

And his one and only choice, of course, fell on Shang Qinghua. Out of all people, he believed his Shishu would understand his situation best. The only problem was he’d been ignoring his calls! He hadn’t heard from him ever since that day of their trip to the amusement park. Ever since the confession that Shang Qinghua was a *God*—the ruler of his past.

But Luo Binghe was set on making him his tutor! It had to be him!

His determination brought him and his lover to an internet cafe at two in the morning.

Just as Shen Yuan predicted, Shang Qinghua was there at the reception desk!

Shang Qinghua was so focused on what he was doing, he didn't even notice when Luo Binghe approached.

Luo Binghe took the opportunity to test out his newly obtained ID card. "I'd like a computer please," he said, handing his card to Shang Qinghua who didn't look up at all as he took it. Grunting in response.

Shang Qinghua looked like he hadn't shaved for days. Opening the computer with a frown on his face, he froze when he noticed the name. Glaring at the card like it had personally offended him.

"You look like shit," said Shen Yuan, putting his own card at the desk. "Two computers."

Shang Qinghua's eyes were wide as he looked up. And so was his mouth. "What..?" He was literally gaping as he turned to look at the ID card in his hand. "How?" he asked, this time looking back at Luo Binghe.

Luo Binghe had asked the same question when he first saw it too! He couldn't even keep his excitement when he asked, "Does it work?"

ID cards were needed to open computers at the internet cafe, Luo Binghe had read! He leaned closer to peek, turning his hopeful eyes to Shang Qinghua who only stared back in shock.

"Does it work?" Luo Binghe asked again, almost demanding. "Did you swipe it? Does it work?"

"It.. does," said Shang Qinghua, scowling as he handed the card back to its owner. Shen Yuan nudged his own card closer then, making Shang Qinghua scowl even harder. He took it anyway. Muttering under his breath, "Rich people are scary."

Luo Binghe didn't listen, too busy admiring his ID card.

Shang Qinghua wanted so badly to run but his shift was far from done. Left with no choice, he frowned as he opened another computer for Shen Yuan. "Row C. Number five and six," he said, giving the card back.

"Okay," Shen Yuan said, taking his card.

But he stayed in place. Luo Binghe too.

"My boss is watching," Shang Qinghua tried saying without moving his lips too much. "Whatever you're planning, please wait until my shift is done."

"You won't run away?" Luo Binghe asked.

Shang Qinghua shook his head.

Luo Binghe kept his eyes on him for a while before finally shrugging. “Okay.”

They left him alone. The relief didn’t stay for long though.

How could Shang Qinghua focus when he could hear Luo Binghe coughing from the smoke?! There were many people smoking! The internet cafe was small and Shang Qinghua could see him covering his nose even from his desk! His baby! His son!

Shen Yuan seemed to be convincing Luo Binghe to go, but that kid looked determined! Staying firm in his place as he shook his head.

Shang Qinghua squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. He jolted when his boss tapped on his shoulder. Asking, “Isn’t that the knife fairy?”

Shang Qinghua turned to look at her, immediately nodding.

“And the rich boyfriend?”

Shang Qinghua nodded once more.

At this, his boss frowned. “What are they doing here?”

Exactly! That was what Shang Qinghua had been wondering as well! He shook his head fervently. He didn’t know!

His boss squinted her eyes at him then. Sounding cautious when she spoke, “You know them?”

Shang Qinghua kept his mouth shut.

When his boss turned to look at Luo Binghe, he was already looking at her. Grinning wide when their eyes met. Even waving his hand like an excited child!

She blushed. Waving back before smacking Shang Qinghua’s shoulder. She told him she’d take over his duty. And just like that, Shang Qinghua was dismissed early! Luo Binghe ran toward him the moment he stood up from his seat.

It was weird.

Even weirder when he was faced with the question: “Will you be my full-time tutor?”

The answer came from his boss. Shouting out, “Yes!”

Shang Qinghua just lost his job!

—

Teaching Luo Binghe turned out to be easy.

He was so quick to learn. So eager! Shang Qinghua wondered why Shen Yuan hired him and paid a ridiculous amount of money. The amount Shang Qinghua made in one week surpassed his old monthly salary!

Shen Yuan could've taught the kid himself! The lessons were very easy! And fun, he did not dare say out loud.

Shang Qinghua was *so* soft when his son struggled with elementary level math. It was, needless to say, something he'd never imagined.

Shen Yuan sometimes came to watch, but then Luo Binghe would act all shy and pushed him out of the room. Mumbling something like *distracting* and *can't focus* and fuck did Shang Qinghua just heard *too sexy?!*

Shang Qinghua decided it'd be best not to ask. He must've been hired for a reason he would rather not have heard.

It was truly fun though. Luo Binghe didn't mention a thing about his past life, only focusing on the lesson each time Shang Qinghua came.

"I'm sorry," Shang Qinghua said one day.

Luo Binghe was taking notes. Not looking up as he asked, "What for?"

"Writing your life like that." Shang Qinghua fiddled with his pen. "And for running away."

"You made me." Luo Binghe stopped writing to look up at his Shishu. Saying, "The things I've been through.. they were hard. But I'm here now. And I wouldn't have been here without you. You're the closest thing I have to a family. I mean, gege is different. He's *everything*. But you're family."

Shang Qinghua didn't say a word. When Luo Binghe reached to lightly bump his knuckles against his hand, Shang Qinghua stopped fiddling with his pen.

"Isn't that how you call me? Your son?" Luo Binghe asked. "Calling you baba would sound weird, I would very much like to stick with Shishu. But I don't dislike the idea of having you as my closest person."

Then he quickly added, "I mean. After gege. If Yuan gege is here, then you're here. But like, still close." Luo Binghe made wild gestures with his hands before shaking his head. "Wait. I'll draw."

Shang Qinghua just watched as Luo Binghe drew a big circle on his note.

"This is my world," he explained, drawing tiny circles inside. "This is me. Yuan gege. You."

Shen Yuan's circle was attached so close to Luo Binghe's own! But Shang Qinghua's circle wasn't placed so far away from them.

Shang Qinghua couldn't even hold his laughter. Asking, "Why are we so tiny?"

His lips parted in a small gasp as Luo Binghe just started to draw.. more tiny circles. Giving each a name; “This is Yanyan. A-Yi. Mama. Granny. Fei Ge. Da-Ge..”

Luo Binghe had a fond smile on his face as the list went on. Shang Qinghua couldn’t take his eyes off him.

“That’s a lot,” Shang Qinghua ended up saying.

“My close people.” Luo Binghe looked up once he was done drawing. “My world.”

The paper was full of only circles, but Luo Binghe looked *so* proud. So happy. His smile was so genuine, Shang Qinghua almost felt bad for asking, “Can I keep it?”

But he had to ask. He knew he had to.

Luo Binghe’s smile just got even wider. Tearing up the paper from his note before handing it to Shang Qinghua. Saying, “You can.”

And if Shang Qinghua cried as he hugged it to sleep that night, nobody had to know.

—

Luo Binghe had his birthday celebrated.

Shen Yuan’s family *always* made time for birthdays and Luo Binghe had participated in a few celebrations during his stay—including his lover’s, who preferred small dinners over anything grand.

It just didn’t register in his mind that his birthday would also be celebrated.

Luo Binghe didn’t know exactly when he was born. Or when he was created. But the one listed on his ID card fell on the same day as Shen Yanxue’s! And he was more than happy to celebrate it the way she wanted to.

The decorations were all pink! But Luo Binghe truly didn’t mind.

What mattered most was his close people were *all* there. His world.

He did not make a wish when he blew his candle. What more could he possibly wish for? All he needed was here, surrounding him with warmth!

Luo Binghe didn’t even know what to say when they wished him a happy birthday. He had never received such wishes!

When Mama pulled him into a hug and thanked him for being born, Luo Binghe burst into tears. He was not at all prepared to hear that.

Shen Zhengfei laughed at him and ruffled his hair. Saying, “Aren’t you a soft demon lord.” But he pried him off Mama anyway, taking a turn hugging him in the most bro-est hug as he smacked his back. “Thank you for coming into my brother’s life.”

Luo Binghe just cried even more. It was overwhelming. Especially when he got into his presents—Shen Yanxue insisted that they unwrap presents *right* after blowing candles, and found so many things he never knew he *wanted.*

Granny got him a shiny frying pan! He loved that a lot. Baba bought him a guqin! Shen Yixing bought him a tea set! Shang Qinghua got him a pen, a really pretty one with his name engraved on it. And so much more!

The most confusing present award went to Shen Zhengfei though. A jetski. It was already delivered to his home, he said. What was he supposed to do with that?! But Luo Binghe wanted it nonetheless!

The best present award went to Shen Yuan. Of course. It was a simple, elegant note in green. Shen Yuan looked shy as he whispered, "For your three good things and to-do list."

Luo Binghe loved it.

It was the first thing he searched for when the party was over, stumbling into the guest room with his lover supporting his body. Drunk from all the wine and all the *love.*

They were spending the night at the Shens' vacation home, away from the busy city. The perfect place to play with snow.

It snowed outside! If Luo Binghe could walk properly, he would've gone out and played a little! But he couldn't even stand without swaying!

"My book," he reminded his lover.

Shen Yuan laughed as he sat him down on the bed, giving his lover a kiss on the forehead before giving him the note. "Here."

Luo Binghe took it, extending his other hand. "Pen."

Shen Yuan gave the pen. Shang Qinghua's gift.

Luo Binghe was about to try writing before he whined, shoving the book and the pen back at his lover. Announcing, "I'm drunk."

"Do you want to skip today?" Shen Yuan offered.

Luo Binghe immediately shook his head. "You write," he said, pulling Shen Yuan to sit down next to him. "Today's three good things. One."

Shen Yuan rushed to open the first page and wrote for him.

"Birthday," said Luo Binghe. Adding not long after, *"My* birthday."

He was watching as Shen Yuan wrote. Only speaking once he finished, "Two. My people."

"Your people?" Shen Yuan asked, looking at his lover with an amused smile on his face.

Luo Binghe only shoved his lover's face to focus back on the note. "Write!"

Shen Yuan obediently did.

Then, "Three. You."

At this, Shen Yuan laughed. "Do I write my name?" He asked.

Luo Binghe only nodded. Once he was done with his three good things, he took the book from his lover to put it somewhere safe. "Just three good things," he said, getting up. No to-do list! There were so many things he wanted to try tomorrow!

Shen Yuan steadied his lover as he got up, gently leading him toward the bathroom once he was done. He helped his lover clean up. Brushing his teeth for him and giving him praises for listening so well.

He helped him dress up for bed too, getting down on his knees to put on socks because his lover's feet were cold.

"No!" Luo Binghe swatted his lover's hand away. "No socks!"

Shen Yuan knew that his lover didn't like wearing socks. He never said a thing about that, thinking that Luo Binghe just found socks uncomfortable. But Luo Binghe looked truly upset when he tried to put it on, he needed to ask, "Why?"

"I don't want to be freed," Luo Binghe said, lips jutting out into a pout. Voice incoherent as he mumbled, "..'by."

But of course Shen Yuan caught that. How could he not?!

Dobby. Luo Binghe mentioned Dobby. Dobby was freed when he was given a sock, that was what Luo Binghe watched. Shen Yuan remembered how his lover's gaze lingered on him after that one scene. Mumbling something about being lucky to have a kind master?

Shen Yuan gaped.

He sat down on the floor, taking his lover's feet onto his lap as he exclaimed, "I don't own you! Not like that."

"We share. What I own, you own too," said Shen Yuan, giving his lover a foot massage as he listed, "Warmth. Dreams. Fears. Life." Then he held up the socks. Going on with the list also as an offer, "Socks?"

Luo Binghe's eyes widened, letting the words sink in before he nodded. "I like sharing," he said.

Shen Yuan chuckled as he finally put on those socks, looking up at his lover with a grin once he was done. Asking, "Did you poop today?"

Luo Binghe, who was smiling before the question, whined and tried to kick his lover away. “That’s one thing I don’t wanna share!”

But Shen Yuan was holding onto his legs! He clung! “Whyy,” he asked. It was cute how Luo Binghe still got shy after the frequent questions for that matter. Shen Yuan just needed to make sure, alright! Daily check up!

“No.” Luo Binghe tried to kick him again. He wriggled free from his hold and crawled away from him, immediately getting under the cover.

Shen Yuan climbed up the bed, following his lover as he laughed. He settled down next to him and pulled Luo Binghe into his arms. Whispering, “I love you.”

Luo Binghe let out a sigh in content, snuggling closer to his lover as he said the words back; “Love you.”

That night, he fell asleep rather easily.

It felt like home. Funny considering how he was miles away from home.

Chapter End Notes

31th chapter at the 31th.

i have SO many things to say but first of all: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA. it's done! it's done! it's done!

so many things happened over the past six months and this fic had been helping me through a lot. THIS IS MY BABYYYYYYY my first chaptered fic my Baby. one that I hold Very Dear. thank you for staying with me until the very end, also wishing everyone a happy new year!

this fic is retweetable here

also may I ask what's the most memorable scene of this fic to you? i'm /really/ curious like honestly i've been rereading AND HOW ARE THERE SO MANY CHAPTERS OF THEM BEING JUST AT HOME anyways pls feed my curiousity i love u

Chapter 32: bonus chapter 1: the main character is Shen Yuan

Chapter Summary

> “No.”
>
> Luo Binghe tore his gaze away from his lover to look at the dummy disrupting his daydream.
>
> “Whatever you’re thinking about, no,” said the dummy. Who apparently had her eyes set on *his* lover. Luo Binghe’s lover!

Chapter Notes

> IT'S BEEN YEARS??? shen yuan faceCARD REVEALS????? sv fandom it took YEars but we finally got to see that beautiful face so here is the unplanned bonus chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No.”

Luo Binghe tore his gaze away from his lover to look at the dummy disrupting his daydream.

“Whatever you’re thinking about, no,” said the dummy. Who apparently had her eyes set on *his* lover. Luo Binghe’s lover!

“And what is it that I’m thinking about?” Luo Binghe asked, making the dummy turn to look at him with a raised brow.

“You really want me to spill it out?” The dummy–Kwon Dahee, asked. Making a face as if Luo Binghe had personally offended her. “You’ve been staring from the first moment that handsome professor stepped in. You don’t even bother to pretend looking at the slides! Only shamelessly looking at his face with *those* eyes. You’re like, literally seconds away from drooling. Do you still want me to tell you your oh-so-readable thoughts?”

“No,” Luo Binghe said. Beating none of the allegations and wiped the corner of his lips. You know. Just in case. He then leaned a little to whisper, “Was I that obvious?”

“Tone it down,” Kwon Dahee whispered back. Nudging him away right after saying, “Word has it that he just got engaged back home before coming here.”

Luo Binghe wanted so badly to puff his chest all while proudly shouting, *to me!* but he knew just how much this job meant to Shen Yuan. So he kept his mouth shut. Instead he said, "What a lucky person."

"I know right." Kwon Dahee sighed dreamily. "I heard he built a whole publishing company just to publish his lover's first book. Making sure his lover got every penny the book deserves."

Now that.. was definitely a misinformation.

She wasn't wrong about the whole publishing company thing. Author's rights and all. But Shen Yuan had built all that for his *bro!* not his babe! His babe was right here!! In this very classroom!!

Breathe in. Breathe out. Luo Binghe had years of training. He could do this.

Just as Luo Binghe was about to say, or more like, *burst* out a word, Shen Yuan cleared his throat. Catching attention of the class, which wasn't really necessary since all eyes were already on him anyway, but *very* necessary to stop Luo Binghe from spiraling.

"So what do I want to see for next week's reaction paper?" Shen Yuan asked. Tone sounding like he's talking to a bunch of preschoolers instead of perfectly grown adults taking their master's.

"You want our thoughts," Luo Binghe immediately answered. And of course, to show off to the entire class (and to his lover) that *he* was the one paying the most attention, he added, "You want us to read the paper you uploaded on the elearning and find one paper of our choice with the same topic. You don't want a summary of the papers. You want our thoughts. Our critics. Our ideas. Our *feelings* while reading those."

Shen Yuan's smile was soft when he nodded. Acknowledging him. "Someone's clearly paying attention," he praised.

Luo Binghe felt like he could fly.

But someone in the back just had to ruin it with, "And it has to be within one page!"

Shen Yuan laughed at the sudden battle of who's paying more attention. "That's right," he said. "I don't want to read your raw scramble of thoughts. Cook it first before submitting. Add some MSG. Make it fun for me to read. I have to grade everyone's papers anyway, the least you could do is keep me awake during the whole process."

"Yes, Sir!" someone shouted. Luo Binghe had remembered correctly that he was from the department of computer science. What's a software major doing in a class studying cultural contents? Luo Binghe didn't even need to ask to find out.

Half, or more like eighty percent of this class, were here because of Shen Yuan. Luo Binghe included.

It was the start of a new semester and today marked the first day of Shen Yuan's official appearance after all those rumors of the new handsome professor spreading throughout the campus.

An undergraduate student had asked for his number right in front of the campus gate. Found out that he was a professor instead of just a handsome graduate student like she thought he'd be. Still asked for his name and department anyway despite not getting his number. Then boom! The next day, their campus board on a student forum app called 'Everytime' was full with the talk of Shen Yuan.

Luo Binghe had only found out about it today. He was too busy spending the holiday with his lover to keep up with school stuffs! Besides, master's students didn't have access to the application. But apparently the word spread wide enough that even people from different majors signed up for this class. It was Luo Binghe's third semester here and yet it was his first time seeing a graduate class this full. It was literally a war during course registration!

Many years ago when Luo Binghe had still been learning how education in this world works, he never would've thought that he'd pursue his study this far. Shang Qinghua had taught him various subjects with gradually increasing difficulties while Shen Zhengfei had taken care of fabricating his whole education history. Scary what money could do. But thanks to his money-earned high school diploma and Shang Qinghua's hardworks, Luo Binghe managed to get into one of the top universities for his undergraduate degree.

During this whole thing, Shen Yuan had resumed his study and graduated before building a publishing company so Shang Qinghua could write what he wanted with no pressure. He was his bro's number one supporter, Luo Binghe couldn't even deny. Their bonds were unbreakable in a way that Luo Binghe and Shang Qinghua's bonds were unbreakable. Like family.

Shen Yuan took his master's in public relations and advertising. Again, to support Shang Qinghua and the company he built. Somewhere along the way he realized his true calling was teaching. He applied for a combined master's-PhD program and inspired his lover to study hard.

University life was fun. He got to hang out with new friends and experience new things. But something he had always looked forward to was his study session at home with Shen Yuan.

Studying together was the best part of his university years. Luo Binghe cherished those sleepless nights of staying close despite having their eyes glued to their own laptops. They'd snuggle in between; resting their eyes from the screen. Some of the time, Luo Binghe would pretend he was not done with his assignment just to keep Shen Yuan company.

Shen Yuan was the first to bring up that he'd like to experience living in a different country.

Every accomplishment of his company, people had always tied him to his family background. Luo Binghe had seen how hard his lover had been working all while studying. And yet, people said he was successful only because of his family's support. While his family's support did play a big part, Luo Binghe wished people would see Shen Yuan as his own person.

He understood that as long as they stayed in their country, Shen Yuan couldn't be freed from his title. His family was, after all, one of the most influential there.

So it wasn't hard at all for Luo Binghe to agree. Their choice fell on South Korea. They studied the language. Moved right after Shen Yuan earned his PhD.

Their farewell party before their departure turned out to be an engagement party in disguise. Everyone was there when Shen Yuan got down on one knee.

Shen Ziyi had cried before Luo Binghe could even shed a tear. Shen Zhengfei recorded the whole thing with some fancy ass camera. Shang Qinghua was holding on to Shen Yuan's niece–now no longer a toddler, to stop her from running to hug her favorite uncle. Mama and Granny were crying. The whole family was there.

The ring and the bond were just a symbol. They all had already thought of Luo Binghe as one of their own even without the engagement. Thus it took long enough for Shen Yuan to actually propose; he didn't really think he needed to.

But he did. Finally.

And despite looking full of confidence, Shen Yuan's hands were shaking.

Luo Binghe had spent his youth in the bamboo house. He spent his early twenties in this house. Both were home because of one: Shen Yuan. Shen Yuan had been the one providing the warmth of places he associated with home.

Shen Yuan *is* his home.

"Took you long enough," was the last thing Luo Binghe said before bursting out into tears.

Shen Yuan had helped him put on the ring before taking him into his arms. "Thank you for coming into my life," he had whispered. Voice almost breaking from the tears he held back. "There's no refund. You have to love me even when my hair is turning grey."

"You already have some white hair," Luo Binghe sobbed.

Shen Yuan was about to pull away from the hug but Luo Binghe stopped him. Holding him even tighter. Promising, "I will love you even when you have no single strands of hair."

"I won't go bald," Shen Yuan protested. "But just in case. Do you think we need to add that to our wedding vows?"

Hearing that, Luo Binghe had smacked him in front of everyone back then.

They had come a long way.

And now looking at Shen Yuan easily capturing the attention of the class despite being a nervous wreck this morning, Luo Binghe was brimming with pride.

“Why are there so many of you?” Shen Yuan murmured more to himself after dismissing the class.

Many of the students laughed and cheerfully bid goodbye when Shen Yuan left.

Luo Binghe lingered just to hear what they got to say about his lover’s first class.

“How is his Korean so good?” Someone asked.

“Did you even *hear* his English pronunciation?" Another person asked back. “He’s being considerate because our software boy Kamden here isn’t fluent in Korean. What are you even doing here anyway?”

The software boy, Na Kamden, said, “I *am* fluent.” His expression turned dreamy when he added, “I just told him I’ve been living in the States before my master’s and he just assumed I’d be more comfortable if he also gave the original english terms for the important things. How is he treating me so well, even more than the professors in my own dept?”

One of Luo Binghe’s seniors said, “Don’t even think of switching majors. He’s ours.”

He’s mine!! Luo Binghe wanted to shout. But he held himself back.

Everyone was saying only good things about Shen Yuan. Luo Binghe stayed long enough to make sure no one was speaking ill of his lover before finally leaving the classroom.

He went to Shen Yuan’s office and knocked.

“Come in,” Shen Yuan answered.

Luo Binghe opened the door. Peeked in. And Shen Yuan’s whole body went visibly relaxed.

“Binghe,” he called. Switching to his mother tongue when asking, “Did I do okay?”

Shen Yuan looked worried. Nervous just like this morning before they went to campus.

Luo Binghe immediately got into the room, closed and locked the door behind him, and went to give his lover a hug.

Shen Yuan was already waiting. Standing up with his arms open to greet Luo Binghe into his arms.

“You’re doing really good,” Luo Binghe said. Placing a kiss on the side of his head. “Even better than what we practiced. Much better. You’re literally glowing.”

Shen Yuan had practiced for his first day. A lot. Luo Binghe had quite literally memorized Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory by heart.

Shen Yuan chuckled at the exaggeration and squeezed Luo Binghe in his arms. “I was so nervous,” he said.

“You didn’t look nervous at all.” Luo Binghe pulled away to cup his cheeks. “Everyone was speaking so highly of you. You literally started your lecture right on the first day of class *and* gave an assignment right after! But I didn’t see anyone protesting.”

Shen Yuan put his hand on top of Luo Binghe’s. “But what if they drop my class without saying anything?”

“They won’t,” Luo Binghe assured him. “You lead the class very well, even that software boy wanted to change majors.”

The software boy didn’t exactly say that. But looking at the way Shen Yuan laughed, Luo Binghe just got to add, “You remember Kim Jiwoong? The senior that helped me with video directing class last semester that I told you about. He tried to gatekeep you and told everyone to not even think of switching majors because you’re ours.”

Shen Yuan’s eyes widened. “He said that?”

“Yeah.” Luo Binghe gave a little peck on his lips. “You’ve become like, the pride of our department.” Another peck. “I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank you,” Shen Yuan whispered.

“Thank *you* for coming here,” Luo Binghe replied. “You really earned your place.”

Shen Yuan truly did.

Luo Binghe had seen his struggles. All those papers and academic conferences. Back then, Luo Binghe would sometimes boost his exposure by guiding his professors to where Shen Yuan was presenting. Once, a professor he was close to served as the moderator for Shen Yuan’s session. Luo Binghe made sure to put in some good words both before and after the conference.

Shen Yuan had gathered name cards, attended countless dinners, presented and sat through lots of conferences before finally arriving at this university. There had been offers from lesser-known institutions, but Shen Yuan was determined. This was the place he wanted to teach.

“I’ll be home late today,” Shen Yuan said. “Professor Kang and the others insisted we have to celebrate my first day.”

“Okay.” Luo Binghe nodded. Bringing his lover’s face closer to place a kiss on his forehead. “Don’t drink too much, okay? And save some space for dessert.”

“Okay.” Shen Yuan nodded. Pulling his lover into one last hug before finally letting him go. “I’ll see you at home.”

Easy.

Being with Shen Yuan had been easy.

Luo Binghe spent his bus ride home thinking how fast time had passed since he left the world he had grown up in.

Luo Binghe had never known ease as a child. Each day had been a trial of survival; hardship upon hardship. Grief upon grief. Tomorrow was always something to fear, never something to hope for. None of his days back then could be called easy.

Here, in this world, learning that he no longer needed to stay on his toes was the hardest lesson of all. It took time. But slowly, he learned to let go of the fear that happiness was fleeting. That peace was only a short-lived cruel trick before the fall.

With Shen Yuan, he had started living instead of surviving.

He wasn't happy all the time. No one could be. He was human, after all. But he had learned that happiness didn't need to be constant to be real.

And now, the greatest concern weighing on his mind was simply what flavor of ice cream he should order before Shen Yuan came home.

Chocolate felt safe, but they had just ordered that last week. Vanilla would be too plain for the big day Shen Yuan had endured. Strawberry? Luo Binghe was kind of in the mood for that. But Shen Yuan's taste had also grown older with him, he'd probably complain that it was too sweet.

It was ridiculous, really. This quiet dilemma over dessert. Yet to Luo Binghe, it felt like proof.

Proof that his world had shifted so far from what it once was. That he could sit here and worry about ice cream flavors instead of how to survive tomorrow.

And somewhere between chocolate and strawberry, Luo Binghe discovered the quiet comfort of being ordinary.

Chapter End Notes

didn't realize how much i missed writing them until i find myself crying last night because my baby binghe had grown up so much

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